Max Stirner's Egoism

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GLOSSARY

EXISTENTIALISM. A school of philosophy which takes the existing person as the central reality in the universe, and investigates topics such as the meaning of subjectivity and human finitude.

HYPOSTATIZE. To attribute a separate or higher reality to something, thus abstracting it from its relationship of dependence on other things.

IDEALISM. In metaphysics, the view that reality or nature is designed for or exhibits some purpose which transcends subjective human goals.

METAPHYSICS. The branch of philosophy which deals with the ultimate nature of things and seeks to formulate the most basic categories of explanation.

NIHILISM. The view that reality is without meaning or purpose; the denial of objective values of any sort.

NOMINALISM. The view that universals, classes, or abstractions are mere words, and that only particular things have true reality.

ONTOLOGY. The area of philosophy which is concerned with the nature of being, and with delineating various levels of reality.

SOLIPSISM. The view that only one's own mind and its contents exist; everything is seen as one's own ideas.

TELEOLOGICAL. Concerning, or directed toward, ends, goals, or purposes.

WOBBLIES. Members of the Industrial Workers of the World, a primarily American branch of the International Syndicalist Movement (1905 to the present).

PREFACE

Undertaking a study of Stirner's thought poses (to use a very appropriate word) unique problems. The complexities involved in interpreting his writings are similar to those confronted in literary criticism. Numerous questions about interpretation arise: To what degree do the views expressed represent the actual opinions of the author? How seriously does he intend to be taken? What are his purposes in writing? What effect does he wish to have on the reader?

Such difficulties arise from what has been called the aesthetic nature of Stirner's thinking. As Paterson notes, "he reserves the liberty to delete, truncate, amend, transpose, or replace any proposition or set of propositions which no longer fulfils the purely aesthetic function assigned to it in the egoist's overriding purpose of self-enjoyment and self-display".* He sees Stirner's thought as an example of "philosophy as play". Fleischman interprets Stirner's writings as a kind of "anti-philosophy", in which abstract concepts are forsaken in favour of "the world of his immediate experience".†

It is true that Stirner's thought must ultimately be looked upon as a process of egoistic enjoyment for the author. As Stirner himself observes, "I, when I criticize, do not ever have myself before my eyes, but am only doing myself a pleasure, amusing myself according to my taste".* It is possible, then, to hold that at the deepest level Stirner's thought should not be taken seriously on a metaphysical, ethical, or political level, but rather at most be judged according to its value for aesthetic appreciation. Thus, its significance for the reader would correspond to that which it had for the author.

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* R. W. K. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 292-93.

† Eugène Fleischman, "The Role of the Individual in Pre-revolutionary Society: Stirner, Marx, and Hegel", in *Hegel's Political Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. Z. A. Pelczynski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 225.

Yet there is no reason to limit one's view of Stirner's thought in this way, for there are other dimensions to it besides the aesthetic, even for Stirner himself. While he never hesitates to forsake clarity and consistency on behalf of egoistic enjoyment and self-expression, he does venture into speculation concerning the nature of ultimate reality, the meaning of moral values, and the purposes of social organization. His comments on these topics are worthy of analysis for several reasons. To begin with, he often writes as if his criticism of opposing viewpoints and his own ideas on these subjects have some kind of objective validity. The fact that he would maintain his position on egoistic grounds even if it were shown to be objectively absurd does not prevent one from dealing with his claims that there is also *evidence* in favour of that position. Furthermore, many have read Stirner and concluded that he is saying something cogent about the nature of things. His defence of egoism has thus had an important influence on individualist anarchism and "right-wing" libertarianism. Whether those influenced by his thought have really understood his standpoint is irrelevant: in view of the influence, his arguments take on growing historical significance. The present essay is therefore aimed at those (whatever their viewpoint) who wish to consider the coherence, consistency, cogency, and defensibility of Stirner's arguments. Those, on the other hand, who look upon thought as *merely* a means toward egoistic enjoyment will have little to gain from this discussion. I am certain that they will not enjoy it.

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* Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* ed. James J. Martin (New York: Libertarian Book Club, 1963), p. 352. Several new editions of Byington's translation have appeared. Dover has published a paperback version of Martin's edition, which includes his excellent introduction and notes. Harper and Row has also put out a paperback edition, with an introduction by John Carroll. Carroll's introduction unfortunately shows little understanding of Stirner, and unfairly tries to link him to rightist movements with which he would certainly have no sympathy.

Since the original version of this essay was written early in 1971, Paterson's important book *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner* has appeared. Since it is, as he notes, the first full-scale treatment of Stirner published in English, I have gone to some length to take it into account in revising this discussion. It is a quite comprehensive, and on the whole competent treatment, and deals in detail with several subjects which are not discussed at length here. It includes, for example, material on Stirner's life, a summary of his works, and lengthy discussion of his relationship to Marx, Nietzsche, and existentialism. The present essay shares with Paterson's work an interest in the metaphysical and ethical dimensions of Stirner's thought; however, it is much more concerned with the social and political implications of egoism. While I have a number of disagreements with Paterson's interpretation of Stirner, the most important is on the subject of Stirner and anarchism, which will be discussed in detail in the final chapter.

The perspective from which I criticise Stirner is, as will become apparent, a form of social anarchism. While I was once quite sympathetic to individualism, I am now convinced of the inadequacy of that position. Although this discussion deals in particular with Stirner's own metaphysical and ethical egoism, and the resultant social theory, the points made here have, I believe, considerable relevance to many related forms of individualism which depend on similar philosophical underpinnings.

STIRNER AND WESTERN THOUGHT

This essay will be concerned primarily with analysis and criticism of Stirner's ideas, rather than with discussion of his place in the history of philosophy. Yet, in order for one to understand Stirner's significance, it is necessary to have a conception of his relation to his predecessors and contemporaries, and of his influence on those who came after him. This requires some comment on Stirner's relationship to Hegel, Marx and the Young Hegelians, Nietzsche and the existentialists, and anarchism. These brief introductory remarks will, of course, only touch upon subjects about which a great deal can be said, and which are now beginning to receive well-deserved investigation.*

The influence of Hegel is inescapable in Stirner's thought. It is shaped from beginning to end by its relationship of opposition to the Hegelian system. Stirner desires to release the individual from what he sees as an absorption into the totality. No more than Kierkegaard would he accept the reduction of the actually existing individual to a moment in the development of Absolute Spirit. As Brazill notes, Stirner's writings were his "private, violent reaction against all those forces and abstractions that were plunging man toward the depersonalization that Stirner dreaded and feared".† In the realm of thought, Hegel's metaphysics was the great threat to the reality of the individual. Consequently, Stirner wages total war against Spirit as a reality transcending the individual ego. Much more radically than Marx, he wishes to "turn Hegel on his head"—instead of the absorption of the individual into the Absolute, he proposes a total reabsorption of the Absolute (or Spirit in any form) into the individual ego, its original creator.

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* See especially, Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist,* William Brazill, *The Young Hegelians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), and David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (New York: Praeger, 1969). Most comprehensive studies of anarchism discuss Stirner's relationship to it in some detail.

† Brazill, p. 214.

Yet Hegel's influence on Stirner is not merely negative. His methods of analysis and criticism show his Hegelian background, despite his efforts to become the most perfect anti-Hegelian. Early writings like his essay on "Art and Religion" exhibit a strongly Hegelian analysis of the subject's alienation of its creations from itself.* More important, as Brazill mentions, *The Ego and His Own,* Stirner's one major work, has the underlying Hegelian theme of alienation and reconcilation.† The first part deals with the various creations of the ego (like God, Spirit, right, and the human essence), which it falsely comes to accept as transcendent realities. The second part shows the ego as creator and source of all. Furthermore, as Paterson notes, parts of Stirner's discussion in the book even seems to be modelled according to the Hegelian schema of triadic development.§

Stirner was not alone in his rebellion against Hegelian metaphysics. He was part of a remarkable group of thinkers of the 1840s who were similarly related to Hegel. All had been trained in the dialectical method, and all had rejected Hegel and sought to eliminate all traces of idealism from their thought. This group, called the Young Hegelians (or Hegelian Left), included, in addition to Stirner, Marx, Engels, Feuerbach, David Strauss, Moses Hess and Bruno Bauer, to mention the most important members. As will be discussed shortly, all the Young Hegelians wished to construct a materialist philosophy in which Christian and idealist concepts of a supernatural reality were to be eliminated. "Criticism" for this school of philosophers meant a reductive analysis of all ideals and values, aimed at revealing their source in an underlying material reality. Stirner, who claimed to uncover hidden idealism beneath the allegedly naturalistic positions of his Young Hegelian opponents, was perceived by all of them as a challenger who could not be overlooked. According to MacLellan, "Stirner can thus be seen as the last of the Hegelians, last perhaps because he was the most logical, not attempting to replace Hegel's 'concrete universal' by any 'humanity' or 'classless' society since he had no universal, only the individual, all-powerful ego."* Stirner claimed to put an end to the Young Hegelian dialectic, an end which left all values above the individual entirely destroyed.

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* See Max Stirner, "Kunst und Religion" in *Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes: Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum* (Berlin: Schuster und Loeffler, 1898).

† Brazill, p. 215.

§ Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* pp. 39-40.

Many of the Young Hegelians saw Stirner's assaults on their positions sufficiently alarming to warrant replies. The response which has been most widely known is the lengthy attack on Stirner contained in Marx and Engels' work *The German Ideology*. Ironically, until recently Stirner has been remembered most as the object of that attack, and his name has appeared frequently in lists of "utopians", anarchists, and "petit-bourgeois theorists" whom Marx is supposed to have successfully demolished a century ago. It is only recently that scholars have begun to recognize how seriously Marx and Engels took Stirner's challenge, and the possibility of Stirner's influence on their thought has been considered.

Stirner seems to have influenced Marx's development in several ways. First, the former's attack on abstract concepts such as "the human essence", while aimed primarily at Feuerbach, obviously applied equally to Marx, who was developing in his early manuscripts concepts like "species essence" and "species life". Paterson convincingly argues that *The Ego and His Own* is in part responsible for the less humanistic and existential tone of Marx's writings after the

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* MacLellan, p. 119.

1844 manuscripts. "Thus, from a passionately moral commitment to communism as a humanistic creed, in a relatively short span of time Marx transferred to a sociological affirmation of communism as the historical outcome of objective economic forces."* MacLellan notes that there are similarities between Stirner's ideas and those of Marx on several points. Stirner, for example, emphasises in *The Ego and His Own* the creative action of the individual in shaping society, and he sees human culture as the product of individual self-expression, thus rejecting "static materialism",† along with various forms of idealism which would objectify human creations. The concept of "praxis" which Marx was developing at the same time also stresses the creative nature of human action, and rejects all viewpoints, including materialist ones, which overlook the dynamic human element in the shaping of the world. Moreover, Stirner's analysis of labour (which will be discussed further) contains ideas quite similar to Marx's concepts of surplus value and alienation under capitalist division of labour. Since *The Ego and His Own* was published at about the same time as Marx was completing his 1844 manuscripts, no simple relationship of influence by Stirner can be proposed. Yet the interrelationships between the various Young Hegelians (many of whom met in the group "die Freien") makes it obvious that Marx was aware of Stirner's position even at that early stage. The impact of Stirner's thought on the Young Hegelians can hardly be overestimated in view of a startling letter from Engels to Marx, which is cited by Paterson. Engels reveals that after reading Stirner's book he was temporarily converted to egoism. Not only does he express agreement with Stirner's criticism of Feuerbach, but he admits that "it is equally from egoism that we are communists".§

The question of Stirner's influence on another major philosopher, Nietzsche, is one which has received a greater amount of attention, in view of the obvious similarities between the writings of the two thinkers in both style and content. Stirner's criticism of Christian morality and altruism and his call for an egoistic ethics are echoed by Nietzsche's critique of "slave-morality" and his demand for a ruthless "master-morality" to replace Christian and bourgeois values. Stirner's stress on the unique ego foreshadows Nietzsche's emphasis on the creative individual. The former's *Unmensch* might be seen to be in some ways a prototype for the *Ubermensch* of the latter. Furthermore, both attempt to show the pursuit of power underlying human motivation. For these and other reasons, the two thinkers have often been linked as foremost proponents of egoism and individualism.

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* Paterson, p. 117.

† MacLellan, p. 131.

§ Paterson, p. 103. Engels to Marx, Jan. 20, 1845.

In spite of these many similarities, the two thinkers ultimately clash on fundamental issues. Nietzsche, for all his emphasis on the individual, finally transcends egoism, if only for the goal of creating a higher individual. In advocating that individuals strive above all to produce a moral evolution of humanity, he breaks with Stirner, who wishes to put nothing above the actually existing ego. Nietzsche's "master-morality" would be seen by Stirner as a new form of the despised idealism. As he states in a passage which shows both his closeness to Nietzsche and his distance from him, "you are yourself a higher being than you are, and surpass yourself. But that *you* are the one who is higher than you . . . you fail to recognize; and therefore the 'higher essence' is to you—an alien essence".* Although Stirner thus diverges from Nietzsche's position, to the extent that the issues raised by Nietzsche are significant, Stirner's thought is also significant.†

A related aspect of Stirner's historical importance is his connection with existentialism. Recently a study of anarchism appeared, in which an entire chapter was devoted to speculation about a possible relationship between existen-

* Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 37.

† On the limited knowledge which Nietzsche seems to have had of Stirner, see Nicholas Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. 392, and Paterson, pp. 148-49.

tialism and anarchism.* This strange discussion centred around a search for similarities between the philosophy of Sartre and the classical anarchist theorists. While this bizarre methodology points out the extent of academic ignorance of anarchism, the subject of investigation is an important one. Existentialism has its roots in the rebellion against Hegelianism by thinkers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Stirner's ideas are an important part of this metaphysical revolt, and his rejection of the state and political authority is inseparably connected to his rejection of the all-embracing Absolute and the all-encompassing System which describes it. An examination of Stirner's thought verifies Paterson's contention that "just as Kierkegaard is acknowledged to be the founder of Christian existentialism, . . . it would seem that Stirner has some claim to be considered the earliest definite precursor of atheistic existentialism".† In view of his place as one of the earliest rebels against traditional Western philosophy, his rejection of transcendent values and affirmation of the individual has much greater historical signficance than it has usually been accorded.

The contemporary relevance of Stirner derives above all from his influence on the development of anarchism. He is without doubt the foremost exponent of extreme individualist anarchism. His beliefs about the metaphysical priority of the ego, the necessity and desirability of egoistic action, and the contractual basis for human relationships lay the foundation not only for his own extreme egoism, but also for the individualist position in general. The growing numbers of individualist anarchists, anarcho-capitalists, and "right-wing" libertarians all adhere to a considerable degree to metaphysical, ethical, and political premises similar to Stirner's, and many look directly to him as a source of inspiration for their individualism. It is primarily through such influence that Stirner's thought lives on today, and, in fact, increases in importance. For this reason, an entire chapter will be devoted specifically to an investigation of Stirner's relationship to anarchism, and an underlying theme of all that follows is the significance of Stirner's thought in assessing the validity or invalidity of individualism.

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* Gerald Runkle, *Anarchism Old and New* (New York: Dell, 1973), p. 114.

† Paterson, p. 184.

CHAPTER I

THE ONTOLOGY OF THE EGO

Stirner and his fellow Young Hegelians all prided themselves on their critical abilities. Indeed, their debates of the 1840s consisted essentially of an exchange of charges and counter-charges about the adequacy of their attacks on idealism and religion. While all rejected such obviously idealistic concepts as God, the Absolute, and *Geist*, they engaged in a lively dispute over what was to take the place of these discredited ideals.

In Stirner's view, the other members of the Hegelian Left had merely preserved the old religious categories under new names: in short, they had not been critical enough. His attack is directed most forcefully at Ludwig Feuerbach's humanism, which he believed to be the most formidable rival of his own position. Feuerbach, he asserts, has not overcome religious thinking, but rather has merely transformed God or the Absolute into a new ideal—humanity. "To God, who is spirit, Feuerbach gives the name 'Our Essence'. Can we put up with this, that 'Our Essence' is brought into opposition to *us*—that we are split into an essential and unessential self?"[1] Stirner sees Feuerbach's idealization of the human essence as a form of "the Christian yearning and hungering for the other world".[2] But if we alienate our own essence from ourselves and transform it into something above us, we are still idealists, and still religious. Thus, Feuerbach's criticism fails. We must reject all "fixed ideas", whether they be God, the State, Justice, Freedom, or even the Human Essence—we must find some more fundamental reality which underlies all these ideas.*

* In view of Stirner's position, it seems incomprehensible that Brazill would make such a confusing statement as his claim that "like all the Young Hegelians, Stirner accepted the divine spirit as immanent in man" (p. 219).

According to Stirner, the failure of both the old forms of idealism and the new attempts at criticism lie in their presuppositions. They all stop with presuppositions which depend, in turn, on further, unacknowledged, presuppositions. A validly critical approach will reveal the derivative nature of all these presuppositions, in a sense demythologizing them, thus penetrating through illusion until the underlying reality, the ultimate presupposition, is uncovered. Stirner's choice for this ultimate reality is, of course, the individual ego. He calls it a presupposition which is also "not a presupposition at all".[3] Anything which one might propose to oneself as a philosophical presupposition, Stirner notes, must be a thought of that person. Therefore, such a presupposition cannot be an ultimate presupposition, since something further is presupposed by it. The ego, on the other hand, is a presupposition without a further presupposition. It is posited not by a thought, but by its very existence.[4] The ego is not supposed, but is, rather, prior to all supposition. Such an ego is not, therefore, an ideal ego, or an ego in thought, but the ego which concretely exists, and which he believes to be the source of all ideas and all values.

Stirner says that in a sense the ego does not even presuppose itself. For if it did, then it would define itself as a "something", or make itself into an idea. The ego presupposes itself not in this sense, but rather in the sense that "I consume my presupposition, and nothing else, and exist only in consuming it".[5] This statement is a confusing one, and lends support to the view of some that Stirner is a solipsist. It would seem that if the ego consumes only itself, that it is locked in a solipsistic world. More will be said of this later. At this point it must be explained that Stirner is not claiming that the ego is all of reality. Rather, he is propounding a view of the self which in his view avoids the static conception which he thought to lead to idealism and Christianity, both of which all the Young Hegelians dreaded so much.

Rejecting the concept of the ego as a thing or an idea, Stirner comes upon what he takes to be the antithesis of these—that it is not a thing, but a nothing; not an idea, but a process. The ego is called a "creative nothing". In one sense it is a nothing because it is nothing to all others. Stirner believes, as will be shown, that each ego values things only for its own sake. An ego's value to egos other than itself is therefore, in a sense, nothing. But more fundamentally he wishes to explain that the ego is a nothing because it has no enduring form or substance; there is no one self which endures over a period of time, but a series of selves which appropriate within themselves and surpass the prior selves. "I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything."[6] The ego thus has the position of being at once creator and created. "Over each minute of your existence a fresh minute of the future beckons to you, and, developing yourself, you get away 'from yourself', that is, from the self that was at that moment. As you are at each instant, you are your own creature, and in this very 'creature' you do not wish to lose yourself, the creator . . . you are not only creature but likewise your creator."[7] In every action, the self surpasses itself and creates a new self, thus functioning as creator. The created self is at the same time again a creator, since its brief moment of existence consists in acting—and thus creating a new self. The ego is the totality of these momentary selves, from the first self which acts and begins the series, to the last self which is merely created. Stirner holds that it is one ego which exists through all these selves, and that the entire process is a development of this ego.

Several questions arise concerning this doctrine of creative nothingness. First, it can be asked why the ego must be introduced at all. If individual experience can be reduced to a series of momentary selves, why is an ego needed in addition? And if an ego is introduced, what type of ego could it be? According to Stirner's principles, it cannot be a certain "form" or "idea" which each momentary self embodies. And neither can it be a sort of teleological "ideal" toward which these selves are moving. Stirner sometimes seems to want to say that the ego is most closely identified with the total physical organism. But given that there is a series of selves, isn't it a movement into abstraction when one observes the interrelationship between these selves and interprets the organism as an ego in development? What is even worse, from Stirner's point of view, if we are warranted in moving from momentary selves to an enduring ego, why are we not justified in interpreting egos as phases of an even larger process of development? Would not the direction of Stirner's own thought lead back to Hegel, with *der Einzige* reduced to a unique but relatively insignificant and fleeting "moment" in the life of the Absolute?

Another criticism might be made concerning Stirner's view of creativity. If he is willing to recognize the interrelationships between the momentary selves, how can he limit the possibility of interrelationships to the internal experience of an individual ego? The first momentary self in the development of an ego does not appear *ex nihilo,* and after it appears, its actions are not limited in their effect to its own internal development. Furthermore, this development is affected by forces external to the ego. The experience of an individual consists of continual interaction between it and its environment. This again points toward the necessity for integration of the ego into a larger system of reality, and away from the ultimacy of the ego. It would seem that the creator-creature relation which Stirner attributes to the ego can only be supported in the sense in which he phrases it, if solipsism is adopted, and the environment, or other, is absorbed into the ego. Yet he would not want to carry his egoism that far.

In addition to the quality of creativity, the other primary attribute of the ego is its uniqueness (*einzigkeit*). According to Stirner, the ego is *einzig* in the sense of being unique, single, and individual. He places a great deal of importance on the fact that each ego and its property differs from any other ego and that which it has. It does not seem to be the case, as one ethical theorist has written, that Stirner "has a high regard for every individual because he is a rational human being".[9] Rather, if he has such a regard it is because each individual is unique.* In his *Kleinere*

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* This "high regard", if Stirner had it at all in theory,

Schriften, Stirner recognizes that his argument is tautological. "The judgment 'you are unique' means nothing other than 'you are you', a judgment which . . . judges nothing, says nothing, since it is empty, or it is a judgment that is no judgment."[10] But this does not seem to trouble him and it is this same "empty judgment" which lies at the heart of his later writings. What is it that gives the ego a basis for consciously choosing its own interest? It is that it is "incomparable, unique. My flesh is not their flesh, my mind is not their mind".[11]

According to Feuerbach, Stirner's way of attributing uniqueness to the ego is a regression to theology. Religion "selects a single individual out of a class or species and opposes him—as holy and inviolable—to all other indivviduals".[12] Not only is this religious, he notes, it is a clear falsification of reality. The ego is not unique and isolated, as Stirner seems to think. Biologically, the ego finds itself part of a species. It has many qualities which are not at all unique to it, but common to all in the human species. And also socially, the ego is not an isolated unit with its own property. The ego cannot be understood without understanding those with whom its life is intimately connected.[13] The ego is a product, both biologically and socially, of other egos, of a society. As Marx quite correctly concludes about the inadequacy of Stirner's view, "physical and social change, which affects the individual, creating a changed consciousness, . . . are nothing to him".[14]

This failure by Stirner to take into account the place of the environment in forming the ego is perhaps his most vulnerable point, and has been used by numerous critics of egoism since Feuerbach and Marx. Recent writers on ethics (for example, Edel) have pointed out the close relation between an egoism like Stirner's and an atomistic conception of the self.[15] Urban holds the same view and remarks that such a position is becoming continually less convincing, as science increasingly reveals the sociality of the self and

becomes entirely meaningless in terms of practice, as is apparent in his discussion of the relation of the ego to others, and his theories of psychological and ethical egoism.

offers a monistic explanation of reality.[16] Even Herbert Read, who is highly sympathetic to Stirner, admits that Marx was correct in his criticism and that "the 'unique one' is a philosophical abstraction which one can divorce only in theory from the environmental influences which determine the nature of the individual personality".[17] Berdyaev perhaps states this line of criticism in its most radical form. The individual is really lost in such a theory, because "it has no support in anything".[18]

Stirner maintains, it must be remembered, that no concept, no phrases, no words can fully express what the ego is. In view of this contention, it is surprising to find that he also asserts that the ego in some way corresponds to the human physical organism, even if this concept does not fully express the nature of the ego. Stirner often writes as if the ego were identical with the body. To have an egoistic interest requires that one "has fallen in love with his corporeal self, and takes a pleasure in himself as a living flesh-and-blood person".[19] This seems to imply that the ego is material to nature, and that it is closely associated with the biological life of the individual. Stirner clearly holds that the ego has no existence apart from this life. The ego is finite and transitory.[20] It exists only so long as the series of momentary selves continues, until its creativity comes to an end. It is a "mortal creator".[21]

Although Stirner wishes to attack idealism by this reduction of the highest level of reality to a material or bodily basis, the category of coporeality itself seems at times to become idealized. In discussing ideas like God and the state, which become powers external to the ego, Stirner asserts that "if I destroy their corporeity, then I take them back into mine, and say: 'I alone am corporeal' ".[22] The question arises of why he limits his discussion to the ego and its ideas, forgetting about the concrete material world external to the ego. Assuming again that he is not adopting solipsism, a thoroughgoing materialism would seem to require that he attribute the same status to the material world as to the ego. It must be concluded that since he does not do so his use of materialistic language does not indicate the adoption of a simple materialist position, and that in his view the corporeality of the ego differs in some very significant way from the corporeality of the world.

In emphasizing such limitations of the ego as transitoriness and finitude, Stirner does not believe that he in any way reduces the ego. Rather he intends to exalt it, for in doing so, he denies that there is an ideal self beside which the actual corporeal self seems an imperfect copy. Furthermore, according to his unique logic, the ego is completely perfect in its present state. "We are perfect altogether! For we are, every moment, all that we can be; and we never need be more."[28] This seems somewhat contradictory, in view of the fact that he speaks of the "development" of the ego, since development would appear meaningless as a quality of that which is perfect. This paradox might be explained in the following way. The ego can, in a sense, develop, since it can become more and more conscious of itself and other things as its own property. It can develop its "ownness" (*eigenheit*).* Yet the ego is also perfect morally, since it is the source of all moral values (to the degree that such egoistic values can be called "moral"). Similarly, the ego can develop physically, since it biologically goes through a series of changes, which Stirner associates with the succession of momentary selves. Yet the ego is at the same time physically perfect, for there is no ideal beside which it can be imperfect, and its existing actuality is the only possible reality.

While this explains the paradox of perfection and development, yet the question of the validity of this view can only be answered in a discussion of two particular points: the subjective egoistic theory of value, and the belief in the identity of reality and existence. The former of these will be treated throughout this essay, particularly in the section dealing specifically with Stirner's ethical egoism. The latter is closely connected to his view of abstraction and ideality in relation to the ego, which will be treated shortly. First, a related topic, the unity of the ego, must be touched upon.

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* "Ownness" is the term coined by the translator Byington for the German *Eigenheit.* Paterson uses "self-possession". While the latter captures much of Stirner's meaning, Byington's term is used here because its unusualness suits it better for use in reference to Stirner's distinctive concept. Another English term which might be used is "possessiveness", but this also fails to fully capture Stirner's meaning. The concept will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

It has been mentioned that Stirner rejects the idea that the existing self can be placed alongside an ideal self which it must have as a goal for development. To do this, he says, is to "separate myself into two halves".[24] However, he realizes that the ego is still not a unity in the most radical sense. He does not undertake a rigorous analysis of the elements which make up the ego, but he recognizes that it is at best a unity-in-plurality. His discussion in many ways seems to revert to a Platonic psychology, dividing the self into desires, will, and intellect. He is particularly concerned with rejecting any tendency to overemphasize either the desires or the intellect. He sees danger in a condition in which "the desires run away with us, free and unbridled",[25] and believes that the sensual person is "bound" or limited by such desires.[26] However, the solution is not to idealize the intellect instead, which Stirner sees as the error of Christianity. Just as in sensuality the part is allowed to determine the whole, so in Christianity (Stirner's general term for determination by mind) another part is allowed to overstep its role of serving the needs of the whole. Thus, in Stirner's Platonic psychology it is the will which finally emerges as the ruling faculty. As Lange notes, he "lays so much stress upon the will, in fact, that it appears the root force of human nature".[27] The egoist shuns the rule of either reason or desire; rather, "he pursues spiritual and material interests *just as he pleases*".[28] To follow the intellect or senses leads to the fragmentation of the ego, while an act of will is looked upon as an expression of an integrated ego.

There are several problems in Stirner's argument here. First, he fails to explain how the ego can in some way have a will apart from its desires and its intellect. It would seem that whatever the ego pleases to do would be rooted either in physiological or psychological needs or in a goal or end which is formulated as a concept or idea. Stirner seems to thinks that the ego can have some kind of will which is independent of both desires and ideas, or which is in some sense above them. The implication is that though one may choose to follow the demands of desire or rational judgment, these can both be overruled in the name of egoistic self-interest. It can be asked, however, what type of interest an ego might have which cannot be grounded in desire or reason. Stirner replies that one has a "personal" interest, but he gives no explanation of its nature or the basis for its independence.

Another problem arises in Stirner's related argument that one does not "do as one pleases" when acting in accord with reason or desire. In this case he uses the tautology that when one makes a choice one acts as one pleases. Since the egoist realizes the unity of the ego, he or she doesn't follow reason or desires, but chooses for him or herself. But isn't it just as true that when one decides to follow reason or desires, one equally does as one pleases? No matter what factors have influenced the decision, the final choice to be guided by a certain interest is his or her own individual choice. The real problem is that such a tautology says nothing about the relative merits of Stirner's and his opponent's views. It supports each of them equally.

At times, Stirner seems to be saying that the ego should will to act on a third "egoistic" or "personal" interest which is not equated with, but rather comprehends both the intellect and desires. The ego should have appetites and ideas, but they should not "have it".[29] If this means the ego should keep under control, or create a balance between the various spiritual and material requirements, this would be a return to Plato's theory, since it would mean finally putting reason in the position of determining how a balance is to be achieved. But he would not wish to follow the argument this far. To the extent that he seems to advocate such a balance, he is saying something quite convincing; but unfortunately, this aspect of his philosophy seems to be in contradiction to his thought as a whole, which advocates a ruthless will to power—power over things, persons, and above all, oneself—which is not necessarily guided by rationality.

A subject closely related to Stirner's psychology of the ego is his treatment of the division or estrangement of the ego from its own ideas. This topic engaged a great deal of his interest and is one of the most pervasive themes in his writings. In his early essay on "Art and Religion", he discusses the paradigm case of the estrangement of an idea from the ego. Art, he says, enables humanity to posit a second, ideal self, apart from the actual existing ego. As a creation of art, this second self begins merely as an idea of the ego. However, it comes to be looked upon as something with independent existence, an externally existing self or object.[80] Religion completes this process in interpreting the ideal as God, so that it loses its relation to the ego, and becomes a being to be worshipped, a force above and in opposition to humanity. The ego still maintains its unity beneath the illusion, and shows this by demanding a reconciliation between the ego and its creation, God. Christianity is an attempt to effect such a reuniting, to overcome the polarity between the two.[81] Yet such attempts are hopeless, for religion is itself founded upon an error. What is needed to overcome estrangement is the destruction of the illusion that the ideal exists other than as an idea of the ego.[82] This means, Stirner concludes, that the destruction of religion and all forms of idealism is necessary.

As has been mentioned, the method of analysis exhibited in this early discussion presents strong evidence of the Hegelian influence on Stirner, even though he has moved most of the way to his final egoistical position. In his later writings he continues the theme of the ego's estrangement of its ideas; however, the object of his attack is not so much the Christian concept of God, but rather the Feuerbachian Human Essence. There, "the essence of man" so closely associated with Feuerbach, is his primary example of the lingering force of religious ideas. The "essence of man", he says, is put in opposition to the ego, just as God had been earlier.[83] But, he contends, the ego is not its essence, it is "neither God nor man".[84] The ego is neither these nor any essence at all, for the ego is corporeal, while these are mere ideas.[35] The ego is not "man", but rather "un-man" (Unmensch). It is something that does not correspond to any concept, including that of "man".[36]

At this point it can be seen how closely Stirner's concept of the ego is related to both his materialism, which has been mentioned in the discussion of the corporeality of the ego, and to his nominalism, which derives from the former, and should be elaborated upon now. He makes it clear that in his view only the corporeal is fully real, that the ego is entirely corporeal, and that ideas exist only as a function of that corporeality. Ideas have no independent existence, but only a lesser, derivative reality, since they are not corporeal and depend on the ego for their being.[37] As all ideas are mere thoughts of the ego, so universals have this status. The species, he says, "is nothing".[38] Abstractions like "man" are merely concepts in the mind, referring to nothing objective in reality, for reality consists only of particular things. It might be asked that if there is no basis for universals or species (which are of such importance to thinkers like Marx and Feuerbach), how it is that one comes to have such general ideas. Stirner may have had good grounds for believing that these ideas do not correspond to anything objective in things. However, he does not present any arguments, and the fact that people do, in fact, have such concepts is left unexplained. It is taken more as a corollary of his egoism than a point to be defended in order to give support to his position.

If Stirner fails to give sufficient grounds for his position in this case, his views on a related topic lead him into even greater difficulties. One holding a position like Stirner's might be expected to have difficulty with the problem of actuality and potentiality, which is closely related to the question of universals. For even if universals or abstractions cannot be given a status of reality by abstracting them from existing things, they could, perhaps, be given this reality by proposing (as Whitehead does) that each actuality is the actualization of a potentiality which has a sort of universality as a possibility. On this point, Stirner is quite consistent, if not very convincing. In his view, there is no unrealized possibility, for possibility and actuality coincide precisely. What is possible is only what is. To say that something is possible means only that one can imagine things being a certain way. There is not any real possibility that things could be that way, unless they do, in fact, finally come to be so.[39] Stirner attempts to prove this contention in a dubious way—by arguing that if we imagine something to be possible and it does not occur, then it is obvious that "something stands in the way of the thing, and that it is impossible".[40] This reasoning is, however, circular. The proof that something is impossible is taken to be that it is not actual. With such a criterion, it is not surprising that the only possibilities are found to be actualities. To prove his point, he should have examined the question of freedom and determinism, but instead he begged it. The implication is that he accepts a kind of determinism, as indicated by his statement that "at all times every one uses as much force as he possesses".[41] At times he seems even to go beyond determinism to a sort of fatalism which seems simpleminded and utterly indefensible. In one lengthy passage he suggests that people are born poets, musicians, philosophers, or incompetents, and that their abilities or lack thereof will be manifested regardless of environmental influences.[42] Strangely, he never seems to see any contradiction between his conception of an independent, self-creating ego, and these deterministic and fatalistic ideas.

Stirner, then, rejects all ideas and essences in favour of the ego, which is real and particular. But it is questionable whether he has really escaped that which he attacks, and, if he has, whether the escape has left him in a position which he would desire. Eduard von Hartmann summarizes the situation very well. Stirner attempts to put the ego in the position of an absolute. But how can he do it? Either he "places himself at the mercy of another enthralling idea, whose abosolute sovereignty he recognizes, not however, for this or that reason, but blindly and instinctively, or he conceives the Ego not as idea but as reality, and with no other result than the perfectly empty and meaningless tautology that I can will only my own will, think only my own thoughts, and that only my own thoughts can become motives of my willing . . ."[43] This tautology, it is clear, is the point at which Stirner finally arrives. The problem is that philosophically he can go no further, yet he wishes to, and makes an attempt to do so.

Up to this point the positive qualities of the ego have been discussed—its function as a presupposition; its attributes of uniqueness, creative nothingness, finitude, corporeality, perfection, individuality, and unity; and its position as the source of all ideas and abstractions. But throughout his writings, Stirner contends that the ego cannot adequately be expressed in any such list of qualities. For this reason, he finds it necessary to engage in a sort of negative description of the ego, which, as some of his critics have pointed out, at times seems similar to the *via negativa* of many mystical theologians.

The basic problem which drives Stirner to this negative path is that the ego, as the ultimate reality, is beyond the descriptive powers of any words which might be used to express truths about it; and as is even more important, it is above even these truths themselves. The ego is "who", not "that", a person or subject, not a thing or object, and thus its reality can only be found in life, not in words or concepts.[44] The ego is fully real, since it is corporeal, independent, personal; however, truth has the opposite of all these qualities, it exists only "through you; for it exists only in your head".[45] Truths, Stirner says, are creatures of the ego: They are the thoughts of the ego given an enduring existence by being "set down in words".[46] It is questionable how literally he means this to be taken. Presumably, he does not propose that a fact, such as X exists, can be true or false according to the particular thought which happens to pass through the ego's mind, and is formulated as a proposition. Some, it is true, have apparently taken him literally and interpreted him as a solipsist.[47] But although he seems at times to approach such a solipsistic position, it is not his consistent view. Apparently, what he means to say is that truths of the sort exemplified by the statement that some object X exists are so insignificant in comparison to a higher type of truth, that the word can hardly be used in that context. What he is concerned with is a type of existential truth, a truth which is not known, but which is lived. As long as one is interested in "having the truth", one's concern is directed toward an object, and the unity of the ego is theatened. Instead one "must be true to possess the truth".[48]

Stirner does not seem here to be using the word truth in at all the ordinary sense of the term. He might have guarded himself against accusations of solipsism by using the term in its ordinary sense and proposing that although one can know truth in an objective sense; one must not allow any truth which is known to be placed above the ego, which is the highest value. This is what he apparently means, for in some passages he recognizes that objective truth does exist, even if it has no value apart from the purposes of the ego. "The truth is dead, a letter, a word, a material that I can use up. All truth by itself is dead, a corpse; it is alive only in the same way as my lungs are alive—to wit, in the measure of my own vitality."[49] Perhaps most significantly, he says that "as the riches of this world do not make me happy, so neither do its truths".[50] Since his own ego and his own enjoyment are of ultimate value, truth must be kept subordinate to these. Thus, although he sometimes says that truth is subjectivity, what he means is that he thinks that subjectivity is more important than truth.

Although this interpretation gets Stirner out of the problem of solipsism; it does not help him avoid another standpoint he would not wish to claim, that of mysticism. This would seem to be the position to which he finally comes, for he concludes that after all attempts to express the nature of the ego in words and concepts are made, it is found that the job is done quite inadequately and that the ego is not accessible through these means. The ego "does not seek itself in words", he says in his replies to his critics.[51] The ego is unspeakable, but even more, unthinkable.[52] No concept can express the ego, it can only give a name to it.[58] The ego is finally seen to be an ineffable, incomprehensible mystery, realizable only through non-rational experience. The ego as a creative nothingness begins to remind one of concepts like the *Ungrund* of Böhme. Feuerbach notes this similarity in his article criticizing *The Ego and His Own*, where he relates Stirner's description of the ego to "not only . . . oriental religions, but also . . . Christian mystics and enthusiasts".[54] Stirner's revelation of the means toward the apprehension of reality is as follows: "only thoughtlessness really saves me from thoughts. It is not thinking, but my thoughtlessness, or I the unthinkable, incomprehensible, that frees me from possession".[55] As in other forms of mysticism, the Absolute is held to be beyond thought and the goal is described as liberation. Contrary to most forms of mysticism, Stirner's *moksa* or liberation consists not in the dissolution of the ego but rather in the affirmation of its individuality. The ego is itself the mystical absolute.

While the charge that Stirner attempts to make a new god out of the ego was raised by Marx, Feuerbach, and other Young Hegelians, and is held here to have some validity, Paterson denies that this is accurate. He contends that although the ego is the source of the "moral order", "unity", and "metaphysical meaning" of the universe, the ego "does not literally create its sheer being".[56] Furthermore, he holds that Stirner's nihilistic position implies that nothing, including the ego itself, is sacred.[57] "Since, in the last analysis, nihilism is the refusal to take anything or anyone seriously, it must also be the refusal to take nihilism, or the nihilist himself, seriously."[58]

Paterson is correct on the first point, that the ego does not literally create the universe. Yet the forms of "religion" which Stirner is criticizing—worship of humanity, justice, duty, and so forth—do not presuppose a universal creator. Stirner charges that Feuerbach makes humanity sacred not because he claims that it is the creator of the universe, but because he hypostasizes it by considering it apart from the individuals who compose it. But this is exactly what Stirner does when he raises the ego to an independent reality contrary to its objective place in the course of nature.

Paterson is no doubt correct in his contention that a consistent nihilism would imply that not even the nihilist be taken seriously. But Stirner is not a consistent nihilist. He is very much concerned with ego-created values and it is apparent that at times he does take a value like self-ownership quite seriously. As will be discussed in a later chapter, he can accept the loss of any object "with humour" because no thought and no object is taken seriously. He can cast them all aside, for he is the owner of all of them, and they do not own him. But never does he say that he as the owner does not take himself, the creator of all values and the ultimate reality, seriously. The truth seems at times quite to the contrary.

Thus, the charge of mysticism seems to have some grounds. Furthermore, Stirner's version of mysticism seems to have fewer redeeming qualities, when judged in the light of reason, than other forms. Traditional mysticism can claim to be rationally significant on two grounds: that it shows a considerable degree of uniformity and internal coherence throughout history and across cultures, and that it bears enough relation to other areas of human experience that it seems justifiable to assume that it presents an approach to certain dimensions of a reality common to all.[59] Whether these contentions are true cannot be investigated here. However, Stirner's case seems clear. It is an individual, *isolated* phenomenon, and thus comes to appear not as a contribution to one perspective on reality, but rather as an aberration.

Thus far the discussion has been concerned primarily with the nature of the ego itself. It is now necessary to give a bit more particular attention to the relation of the ego to what is other than itself. (Although the ethical implications of this topic will comprise the following chapters, the fundamental relations which are presupposed by Stirner's ethics must be dealt with first.) Stirner's treatment of the relation between the ego and the other is usually kept within the framework of his discussion of property, a fact which easily leads to misundertanding. He treats a variety of phenomena in terms of their character as property of the ego. For example, goals, ideas, truths, and laws are spoken of as the ego's property.[60] He goes even so far as to speak of other individuals as the property of the ego, and, in fact, of everything being its creation and property. Marx comments that Stirner should have been satisfied with the tautology that everything the ego conceives of is its property, since it is its property as an idea, its speculative property. But rather, he says, Stirner takes the irrational position of claiming everything he conceives of as his real, rather than ideal, property.[61] Although this interpretation of Stirner seems unjustified, Marx also makes the stronger criticism that "everything alien become a mere *appearance*, a mere *conception*", so that Stirner thinks he can change conditions in the world by a mere change of consciousness, rather than having to deal with concrete material and historical realities.[62]

Stirner encourages criticism like Marx's by statements such as the following: "to me you are only what you are for me—to wit, my object; and because *my* object, therefore, my property".[63] This might be interpreted to mean that others have existence only because of their relation as object or property of the ego. But he does not mean this. What he means is not that others *are* merely the objects of the ego, but that the ego should *treat* them as if they were. He recognizes that there is a plurality of egos. But in spite of this seeming concession of equality, he contends that each ego must and should treat all others as mere objects, claiming better treatment for only itself, the only one of which it has real experience.[64] "For me you are nothing but—my food, even as I too am fed upon and turned to use by you. We have only one relation to each other, that of *usableness*, of utility, of use."[65] The question of *why* this exploitative relationship is thought to be the only one possible will be discussed shortly. At this point it is merely established that Stirner does admit the existence of others.

Is this all that he admits? Or is there more to the world than this collection of mutually exploitative egos? He implies at times that there is not, since he writes of the ego as creative nothing creating "everything", and he states that the egoist "recognizes nothing but himself" and "rejects everything outside himself".[66] But he also contradicts such statements flatly by proposing that "it is not that the ego *is* all, but that the ego *destroys* all".[67] Presumably, he means neither of these types of statements to be taken literally. For he does accept the independent existence of the external world. This is seen by the fact that he makes a distinction between feelings and thoughts which are "aroused" by things, and those which are "given" to the ego by other individuals.[68] He approves of the former, which are apparently the raw objective data which can be given a subjective value by the ego. The latter, which consist of an absorption of the values of others by the ego, are rejected. He does not say that objects are created by the ego, but rather that the predicates of objects—by which he means the values which are put on those objects—are the ego's creatures.[69] Thus, the ego does not create all, but rather "destroys all", in the sense that all is looked upon as means toward its ends. Everything is seen as capable of being consumed (and thus destroyed) in the egoistic pursuit of power. Shaw is no doubt correct in his suggestion that Stirner would like to be a solipsist but is forced to reluctantly admit the existence of the world. Failing in his attempt to deprive the world of existence, the individualist "has done all in his power to dismiss it as something inferior and malign".*

This, then, is the metaphysical framework for Stirner's egoism. His world is a world of finite, corporeal egos—egos which, in spite of this corporeality, cannot be described fully in terms which apply to material things. This world also includes an objective realm of objects, objects which, in themselves, are neutral in value. Each ego uses these objects as it pleases, and thus gives them meaning. Each ego, furthermore, must and should treat all other egos in the same way as it treats objects—as means toward its own self-interested ends. The validity of the theories implied in this last contention is a central question of this essay. These theories—psychological and ethical egoism—must now be considered.

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* Charles Gray Shaw, *The Ground and Goal of Human Life* (New York: N.Y.U. Press, 1919), p. 524. If it is not malign, it is certainly in Stirner's view inferior and a challenge to the ego's ownness.

CHAPTER II

PSYCHOLOGICAL EGOISM

The first part of this essay has been concerned with Stirner's view of reality. This view is metaphysically a type of egoism, since, although it does not maintain that the ego is all of reality, it does hold that the ego is the highest level of reality, and that everything else is without meaning except in relation to the ego. The qualities which Stirner attributes to the ego give it a sort of metaphysical superiority to all else. In fact, as the other Young Hegelians correctly point out, it is the kind of metaphysical superiority which religion attributes to God. One might therefore say that in his view the entire cosmos exists only for the sake of the ego. Even in this metaphysical side of Stirner's philosophy, the problem of ethics and value comes immediately to the fore. For the question of value is implied in the relation between the ego and the other. As he turns from metaphysics to explicitly ethical questions, Stirner reveals even more the egoistic character of his thought. If his metaphysics gives the ego a place at the centre of all of reality, his ethics makes the ego the totality of moral reality. It is this latter side of Stirner's egoism which must now be considered.

There are two senses of egoism which are of fundamental significance to ethics. The first of these, which might be formulated in a variety of ways, is expressed simply by Hospers as the proposition of belief "that we should try to maximize our own intrinsic good and ignore everyone else's".[1] This type of egoism, ethical egoism, is one of the basic alternatives to which ethics must address its attention. Yet, there is another sort of egoism which is also of utmost importance to ethics, and it must be considered before ethical egoism itself can be evaluated. This is psychological egoism. According to Hospers again, this view holds that "not merely [do] people always do what pleases them, what they want, etc., but . . . it is psychologically impossible for them to do anything else . . . people invariably do what pleases them by a law of their own nature".[2] It is a matter of dispute, first, whether this statement is true or false, and secondly, if it is true, what bearing this will have on ethics. Since Stirner makes psychological egoism a central tenet of his ethical position, this theory must be examined if an adequate assessment of his egoism is to be made.

According to Stirner, it is true not only that all individuals have egos, but also that they are egoists. It is in the nature of every ego to follow its own interest. All that one does is for one's own sake, and nothing is done for the sake of the welfare of others. People are, he says, totally self-serving beings. He recognizes that it is usually thought that certain actions of people are altruistic, and that individuals are themselves classed as either egoistic or altruistic to varying degrees. He believes, however, that this is an error, and that the basis for the mistake is that people have not analyzed human conduct closely enough—they have not traced actions back to their source. If they had done so, they would have found that both the outright egoist and the apparent altruist are in truth egoists; for both pursue their respective goals for the same reason—each acts as he or she does because of a belief that it is for his or her own best interest. It is this self-interest which is the ultimate end, and toward which other goals are mere means.

Given such a situation, Stirner finds it necessary to divide egoists into two groups—the conscious, voluntary ones, and the unconscious, involuntary ones. In the case of the voluntary egoist, the egoism is obvious; such a person's actions are forthrightly directed toward his or her own welfare. But in the case of the involuntary egoist, an illusion of altruism is created. This illusion arises through the process of the ego's alienation of its ideas. The involuntary egoist allows some idea, be it God, humanity, society, love, duty, or any other, to become separated from its foundation in the mind. It becomes an independent power, a sacred idea, which one must then revere and serve. But such ideas, Stirner says, have no independent reality, no being at all apart from the ego. Therefore, in serving these sacred ideas, one is merely serving oneself and deluding oneself about what occurs. The involuntary egoist is one "who is always looking after his own and yet does not count himself as the highest being, who serves only himself and at the same time always thinks he is serving a higher being, who knows nothing higher than himself and yet is infatuated about something higher . . ."[3] Fundamentally, Stirner's argument is that since there is nothing higher than the ego, when one thinks one is serving something higher, one is merely serving one's own illusion of such a thing and thus serving oneself—the ego.

It should be evident that this part of Stirner's argument has its entire basis in his own metaphysical outlook, and would have no cogency for those not sharing his presuppositions. And considering the tenuousness of these presuppositions, he has so far built a rather shaky foundation for psychological egoism. He attempts, however, to strengthen this foundation through an analysis of altruistic actions which purports to make evident the egoistic nature of these actions, and indeed, all human conduct.

Stirner attempts to prove his case through a consideration of unselfishness (*Uneigennützigkeit*). Unselfishness, he says, is always egoistic. Many people, it is true, believe it is best to be unselfish. But this belief is always based on an underlying assumption that to do so is not merely best, but best *for them*. They believe that it is in their own interest, that "through unselfishness [they] are procuring [their] 'true benefit' ".[4] They are thus acting egoistically. And just as unselfishness as a general goal is egoistic, so the pursuit of all particular objects is motivated by egoism. One might contend that a person who loves, is ambitious, or is avaricious, is not selfish, because he or she is interested in the object of the love, ambition, or avarice. But such people are still egoists, if less efficient ones than the self-admitted egoist. The conscious egoist surveys all his or her many desires and either follows them or rejects them in accord with what Stirner calls one's "personal or egoistic interest",[5] which is superior to any particular desire. The unconscious egoist subordinates to one desire both other desires and this all-important egoistic interest. Such a person is still an egoist, for it is still his or her *own* passion (of love, ambition, or avarice, for example) that is followed. But such egoism is "one-sided, unopened, narrow egoism; it is possessedness".[6]

Stirner particularly emphasizes the fact that love is such a type of egoism, since it is so often cited in defence of the existence of altruism. I love "because love makes me happy, I love because loving is natural to me, because it pleases me".[7] He admits, in reply to Moses Hess's criticism, that one does not love as a mere means to enjoyment. But still he thinks the motivation for love to be an egoistic choice by the individual.[8] In reply to another critic, Kuno Fischer, he says that the idea of a love consisting in self-sacrifice is absurd, because loving is obviously something which we do "because we feel love, because love greatly pleases our hearts and our senses, and because we experience a higher self-enjoyment in love for another being".[9]

A number of other cases of supposed altruism are similarly explained to be egoistic. Creativity is an example. The creative person doesn't discover a truth in order to help others, but "for his own sake, because he desired it . . ."[10] Presumably, Stirner would say that if the creator is an involuntary egoist, he or she would think he or she acted in order to help others, but in fact would do so because he or she "desired to", and would still be an egoist. Or if he or she did so "because it is right to help others", he or she would be egoistically acting in accord with his or her own idea of duty. Religion is in the same way egoistic, for one cares about God and the laws of religion only because one believes that in following them one is doing what is best for oneself. If it were ever found that they "only harm you, that they reduce and ruin *you*, to a certainty you would throw them from you just as the Christians once condemned Apollo or Minerva or heathen morality".[11] Even friendliness and community are motivated by egoism. Some would hold that the sociable person is more altruistic, and only one who seeks solitude is an egoist. But both the sociable and the solitary person are egoists. "If I seclude myself, I do so because I no longer find enjoyment in society; if I remain with people, I do so because they still have something to offer me. To remain is no less egoistic than to seclude oneself". [12] Other examples scattered through Stirner's writings follow the same reasoning.

Stirner's argument in each case is based on the fact that the ego is the centre of all its experience, that it has no ideas, no motives, no objects which are not its own. He recognizes that such an argument is a tautology. In his replies to his critics, in arguing that all, including his three critics (Feuerbach, Hess, and Szeliga) are egoists, he says he is satisfied "to express nothing but an identical judgment, in which he says that Feuerbach does absolutely nothing but that which is Feuerbach's, Hess, nothing but that which is Hess's, and Szeliga nothing but that which is Szeliga's . . ."[13] But even though this it tautological, it has, he believes, an ethical significance. Given each individual's necessary perspective as the centre of his or her world, one must be an egoist, for one's actions must be governed by one's own decisions. The ultimate source of the decision to act is the ego itself, and all actions are thus egoistic actions.

Stirner's arguments for psychological egoism are, to say the least, unconvincing. The case against phychological egoism, and thus against Stirner, has been summarized very well by Bradley. "When we are told that we do nothing but that which we want, we answer, 'yes, for to us that is tautology . . . But this was not all. We do what we want, and we do it *because* we want to do it'. What are we to say to this? We say it is either senseless or false."[14] It is clearly the case that Stirner accepts both of the propositions which Bradley attacks. He wishes to stress the fact that the ego is the centre of its universe, and that its acts are egoistic acts, acts which arise out of an act of will. And he furthermore wishes to argue that the ego acts in a certain way because it is its will to do so. The will of the ego is always to seek self-satisfaction, and actions are determined by this desire to serve the self.

Both parts of Bradley's proposition should be discussed in more detail. First, the statement that "we do only what we want" is a tautology must be considered. Stirner and other egoists, in holding that one does only what one wants, use the evidence than one can only act through one's will or choice. No matter what influences may bear upon the individual's choice to act, the choice is finally one's own. Stirner mentions three possible cases. An individual may choose to act in accord with his or her simple desire for something, in which case it is clearly his or her own will or choice which determines the action. Or one may be convinced to act in a certain way by various influences which Stirner would consider enslaving—morality, religion, custom, etc. But still the individual acts egoistically, for even if one is unwise to accept these alien influences, one does it because one ignorantly believes they are in one's own best interest. And finally, even if one is forced into an action by physical coercion, it is still an act of one's own will, for one has decided that the act is more in one's interest than to resist the force. Every example of human action can be analyzed in this way, so the conclusion is made that all action is egoistic.

A fundamental problem with this type of argument is that it would work equally well as a refutation of egoism. Instead of pointing to the final stage of the decision-making process, one could just as easily make use of the beginning. In one sense, the source of a decision to act is always found in the ego; but in an equally significant (or, rather, insignificant sense, it) is never found in the ego. If one has a desire for an object, actions aimed at gaining that object are motivated by the object itself. If an action is influenced by an ideal of religion or morality, religion and morality are what motivates the action. And if force impels a person to do something, the force determines what is done. An individual's choice to succumb to the influence of desires, ideals, or force is really in one sense a matter in which one has no true choice. For the alternatives available are governed by the variable forces which may come into play in any situation and one does not control what those alternatives may be. For this reason, no choices and no actions can ever really be egoistic, since they are controlled by influences which are independent of the ego, and are directed toward objects which are independent of the ego. A purely egoistic action would be an absurdity, because it would have no content. If I decide to act in a determinate manner, to pursue an object X, then I am not acting out of pure egoism, but I am allowing my will to be determined by X. To be an egoist, I must abolish all Xs, I must absorb all Xs into myself and retreat into solipsism. Unless this is done, and so long as an interaction between the self and the other is allowed, altruism cannot be avoided. At least this is the conclusion if the preceding line of reasoning is followed. A more fruitful path would be pursued, as will become clear, if the question of egoism versus altruism is decided not on the basis of the factors which determine a choice (whether the ego or influences on the ego) but rather on the kind of choices which people make. For any argument which uses evidence like "I act according to my will", or "my will is determined by the choices available to me" is dealing with trivialities. The important question is: "given the willing subject, and the choices available to it, what does it choose to do?"

Stirner's error is that he wishes to use the trivial truth that we do what we want to do as the basis for an egoistical philosophy. But as Butler notes, the "egoism" demonstrated in such arguments is not at all what people mean by egoism or self-love. "If, because every particular affection is a man's own, and the pleasure arising from its gratification his own pleasure, or pleasure to himself, such particular affection must be called self-love; according to this way of speaking, no creature whatever can possibly act but merely from self-love; and every action and every affection whatever is to be resolved up into this one principle. But then this is not the language of mankind . . ."[15] Hospers agrees that arguments like Stirner's do not prove that people "do what they want" in the usual sense of the phrase. He notes that according to the "language of mankind", people often do what they do not want. But he goes further and attacks

Stirner's argument on a more fundamental ground. There is no evidence, he says, that people always do what they want *in any sense*. How does the egoist know that one acted as he or she wanted to? In Hospers' view, the evidence used is simply that the person acted in the given manner. Thus the question is begged.[16] Perhaps the non-egoist cannot offer much evidence that people do not do what they want in any given situation. However, the one example of certain evidence which the egoist can give, introspection,* would seem to be more easily used in proving that there is at least one case of non-egoistic action, as opposed to proving that all cases are egoistic. At any rate, arguments like Hospers' point out that the question of whether one always acts as one wants can certainly not be dismissed as having an obvious affirmative answer. Further matters must be considered, including the distinction between one's will at a given moment, and one's will over a long period of time, one's will arising out of an uncoerced decision, and one's will as influenced by force of various types.

Up to this point, only the first part of Bradley's proposition has been discussed. The second part, that "we do what we do because we want to do it", is at least as significant. Bradley says that this phrase can have two meanings. If it means "that it is a want or desire, which moves us to act", it is senseless. It would be mere repetition, only duplicating the thought contained in "we do what we want".[17] But he goes further and maintains that the statement "we do what we want because we want to do it", is false. It is false if we mean that some "feeling of private satisfaction" is held to be the end for which things are done.[18] One's present pleasure is never the motive for an action, for "if my motive were the present pleasure, by action I must lose the motive and hence the pleasure, or at least get instead a pleasure which was not my motive".[19] Of course, this may not be what Stirner means when he says "I love because . . . it pleases me".[20] But he does seem to mean that he chooses to love, if not for present pleasure, at least for expected pleasure, and that all choices are made with such motives of benefiting the self. What he does not see is that he is taking what is in some cases a by-product of action and making it in all cases the motive. "Admit that of several desires the strongest prevails, admit that of alternative pleasant objects we must choose the most pleasant, yet this is not to admit that we choose between the ideas of pleasures . . ."[21] All success in actions produces pleasure and all failure produces displeasure. For this reason, pleasure often seems to be, as Graham puts it, a "sign of success" rather than an end itself.[22] Stace notes that all motives aim at success or self-satisfaction, and that if a distinction between selfishness or egoism and unselfishness or altruism is to be meaningful, the kind of motives which people have should be the concern, rather than the fact that reaching goals produces satisfaction.[23] It is to be expected for example, that loving pleases one (presumably even Stirner). But it is not necessary that one be motivated to love by the pleasure involved in loving. Some may love out of a conscious desire to gain pleasure and self-satisfaction. But some, and in all likelihood most, probably love because of desire for the person or thing loved. Pleasure is an inevitable result of success in the process of loving, but not necessarily the motive for it.

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* See Albert Leroy Hilliard, *The Forms of Value* (New York: Columbia Un. Press, 1950). Hilliard produces a theory of egoistic psychological hedonism by extending "an analogy, based primarily on my private experience, to cover the whole of organic creation under one postulate" (p. 17). He believes that this bold procedure is not only admissible, but is the only basis for defending numerous universally held beliefs.

Green analyzes very well the basis for the misconception which is now under discussion, and offers additional evidence that such an analysis is correct. Green, like Bradley and others, notes that it is the fact that self-satisfaction and pleasure are always present with the achievement of goals which leads some, like Stirner, to conclude that pleasure or self-satisfaction is always the goal. "It is the consciousness that self-satisfaction is thus sought in all enacted desire, in all desire that amounts to will, combined with the consciousness that in all self-satisfaction, if attained, there is pleasure, which leads to the false notion that pleasure is always the object of desire."[24] But on the contrary, pleasure can never be the object desired, since the possibility of pleasure "presupposes the desire and its fulfilment".[25] Butler makes this same point, noting the necessity of a "prior suitableness between the object and the passion", if pleasure is to exist at all.[26]

Many ethical theorists give examples to support this point. Hospers, for one, says that it is conceivable that one could desire honour and respect after death, and that one does things which might be in themselves disagreeable in order to pursue this goal. It might be proposed that one is acting so that one could get the present satisfaction of imagining the fulfilment of one's desire. But this is to overlook the fact that if one did not first desire the object—posthumous respect—"he could feel no satisfaction in the thought that this desire would be fulfilled".[27] C. I. Lewis gives another example. An action which may have results in the interest of the ego may still be nonegoistic in purpose, as when one gives money to someone in need. The conscious purpose of the donor (it can be assumed at least in some cases) is to help another person. Pleasure certainly results when one sees that the action has achieved that goal, and there is evidence that a person in need of help has in some way been assisted. However, if the benefactor later finds out that the needy person was a fraud, and was not really in need of assistance, then the result changes from pleasure to displeasure and indignation. Presumably, if the end were pleasure, the benefactor should be unaffected by the discovery, since he or she had already gained the desired object. But the case is that the object or end (helping one in need) has been defeated.*

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* C. I. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1946), pp. 501-2. As some of my ethics students have quickly pointed out when confronted with this example, it can easily be argued that the indignation results not from the frustrated end, but from being deceived and made a

In view of the arguments and examples mentioned, it must be concluded that actions which are not directed toward self-satisfaction are possible. This is not to say that all actions are non-egoistic, but merely that the distinction between actions which have an egoistic motive and those which do not is a valid and meaningful distinction. All actions should not be classed together, as in Stirner's thought, under the category of selfishness. Butler divides actions which might be called egoistic into two types, which he calls "cool selfishness" and "passionate selfishness". He says that if the word "selfish" is to make sense, only the former type of action can validly be so labelled. The latter, which consists in "particular movements toward particular external objects" is not really selfish, since it results from a desire for an object, and is only "interested" in the tautological sense that all action must proceed from the will of an individual. Thus, to call resentment, compassion, curiosity, ambition, and such feelings "egoistic", is to divest the term of any but a trivial meaning.[28] In fact, these feelings have a strongly non-egoistic nature. For as Graham notes, "I may want to benefit or injure others without taking account of any effect on myself, out of disinterested love or hate, gratitude or revenge".* This line of reasoning leads to a conclusion very far from Stirner's. While he contends, erroneously, that love is in all cases egoistic, it is, ironically, more accurate to hold that not only love, but also hatred, is in most cases non-egoistic in nature. It is therefore preferable that the term "selfishness" or "egoism" be reserved for an action which "never seeks anything external for the

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fool of. However, it can be argued that at least some of the displeasure might result from disappointment over not achieving the benevolent goal. In any case it is unlikely that one in such a situation would say "At least there's one consolation in the matter—I got my pleasure before I discovered the truth."

* Graham, p. 43. For an interesting defence of the existence of such disinterested feelings from a phenomonological point of view, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego* (New York: Noonday Press, 1957), pp. 56-7.

sake of the thing, but only as a means of happiness or good".[29]

It must be concluded that Stirner is wrong in his contention that psychological egoism is a valid description of human nature, which disproves the existence of altruistic or non-egoistic actions. It is found rather that psychological egoism, if it is to have any validity, must be merely an expression of the tautology that any action of an ego must be in accord with a choice of that ego, or that one cannot act against one's own will. Thus, egoism and altruism are real alternatives. Many theorists have thus spent time usefully in attempting to clarify the distinction between the two. Nowell-Smith mentions dominant interest in one's own pleasure and doing what one wishes at the expense of others as marks of egoism or selfishness.[30] Graham contrasts acting in the hope that one will ultimately benefit from one's action, which is egoistic, to acting out of a desire for an object, which is altruistic.[31] He subdivides altruism into negative and positive varieties, the latter of which would include what is usually called altruism.[32] Schlick sees the hallmark of egoism as inconsiderateness—that one pursues one's own interest "untroubled by the desires and needs of others".[33] Other writers mentioned, particularly Butler, Bradley, and Green, would follow this same analysis. All of these views seem very much in accord with the definitions cited from Hospers. The conclusion implied by these writers is that the word "egoistic" can consistently and intelligibly be applied to actions which have as their motive the welfare of the individual acting, and which do not take into consideration the welfare of others. And "non-egoistic" can be used in reference to actions which have as their motive the desire for an object or the pursuit of a goal other than the actor's own welfare, regardless of the effect which the action may have on the actor's welfare or the pleasure or displeasure it may produce for him or her.

CHAPTER III

ETHICAL EGOISM

Stirner believes that the question of "egoism versus altruism" as it is usually posed is a meaningless one in view of his arguments that all either openly or unconsciously act egoistically. For this reason he does not attempt to show that egoism is superior to altruism, but rather that conscious egoism is preferable to covert egoism which goes under the name of altruism. Since his arguments for psychological egoism are unsuccessful, the basis for such a distinction is undermined. However, given that he had not succeeded in reducing altruism to another form of egoism, Stirner's discussion of the opposition between conscious and unconscious egoism can be looked upon as an argument for the superiority of ethical egoism to altruism. The question then is, given that he has failed to establish the validity of psychological egoism, can he justify egoism as an ethical position?

A considerable part of his argument on this subject consists in the contention that egoism is in accord with the nature of the ego, while altruism conflicts with that nature. A rational egoism, he says, is one which takes into account all the faculties and capacities of the ego and all its interests and needs. It opts in a sense for moderation and balance, as opposed to altruism and all "one-sided unopened, narrow egoism",[1] which exalt a single interest to the detriment of all others. The egoist denies the ego nothing, and does not wish the ego to forsake anything in serving itself. The ego should pursue its interest in everything which attracts its attention, but it must make sure that all its interests are genuinely its own, and are not forced upon it by some alien authority.[2] Conscious egoism is in a sense an affirmation by the ego of all that exists. It advises the ego to accept everything, to make everything its own, but always to do this for its own sake, and on the basis of its own authority.

Stirner contrasts this concern for the entire ego to the denial of certain elements of the ego's nature which he sees as the error of altruism. He believes that in subordinating one's conscious self-interest to the interest of another ego or some idea, one is denying one's own desires. This, he believes, is still at its root egoism, but it is a "cheated egoism".* While the nature of the ego is to affirm itself to the maximum degree, the altruist finds it necessary to deny part of him or herself, to practise self-renunciation.[3] As would be expected, the part of the ego which Stirner believes to be especially repressed by the altruist is the will. Earlier, his view of the will as the highest faculty of the ego was mentioned. His critique of altruism depends greatly on this outlook. As he writes in an early essay, altruism or love "does not allow the development of the will, which first gives one the dignity of a free man".[4]

Stirner's argument here presupposes that the will can be defined as a faculty which expresses in its acts the interest of the whole ego, as opposed to the interest of a mere part which may conflict with that of the whole. But it has been shown that he merely assumes this unique position of the will rather than giving evidence for it. Furthermore, it is not as obvious as he believes that it is only egoism which allows the will to develop. In fact, given his own assumptions, it is obvious that all actions, whether egoistic or altruistic, are the result of acts of the will of the ego. Whether the altruist realizes or overlooks the fact, says Stirner, all his or her actions are expressions of that will. Given Stirner's belief in the centrality of the will in all human action, it becomes meaningless to use the fact that one follows one's own will as an argument in favour of any particular ethical theory. Even an argument that conscious egoism produces a stronger will is questionable, since there is evidence that people have the ability to will strongly both selfish and unselfish actions. Stirner himself gives examples of religious and metaphysical fanaticism, which are, in his view, willing strongly to subordinate all else to an alluring idea.*

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* In all references to Stirner's view of altruism, it will be presupposed that he thinks it to be a type of egoism.

Stirner's contentions that egoism produces a unified person, and that it is necessary for the development of the will, are, then, seriously open to question. He makes a further attempt at a justification of egoism on the basis of his view that altruism is a form of ignorance, and that ignorance cannot be preferred to knowledge. Could he show that only egoism enables one to will intelligently, then he would give a compelling argument for his viewpoint. Unfortunately for his case, his argument consists of a great deal of question-begging, for it is based primarily on his denial of reality to ideas and abstractions, for which he fails to give convincing evidence. His reasoning again resorts to a tautology: in this case, that all one's ideas are one's own. When one formulates some goal or principle of action, one is formulating one's own idea. The fact that they are one's ideas is taken as evidence that they are nothing more than one's ideas. Egoism is the realization that all moral principles and ideals are the property of the ego, having no independent reality, while altruism is ignorance of this, the belief in independent moral ideals.

Stirner applies these ideas to concepts such as rights and duties. We can have no duty to do anything, he says, for duties are only ideas. Neither society, God, nor a moral law can be the source of duty, since none of these are egos, and only egos have full reality.[5] One has no duty even to oneself, since this would imply a division of the ego into two selves, one of which must sacrifice itself for the welfare of the higher one.[6] But the ego is a unity and acts only from will. Belief in duty is ignorance of the fact that the concept is a mere abstraction, created by the ego, and that there is no source for guiding conduct other than the will of the ego.

The concept of right gets a similar treatment. The idea of right, like all ideas, has been created by the ego. But through ignorance of its nature it has been transformed into "absolute right, that which is absolved or unfastened from me".[7] Right has no meaning as such an abstraction, but unlike duty, it does have some sort of significance. The idea of right, Stirner believes, has it origin in might or power. Through abstraction, right is separated from its source, and becomes something which, as an idea, is thought of as being external to the ego, divorced from one's real power. Right becomes something complete in itself; the ego which doubly gave it its foundation (i.e., as a concrete reality and as an idea) is forgotten.[8] Right must again be equated with power. "What you have the *power* to be you have the *right* to."[9] This sort of right "is *egoistic right*: it is right for me, therefore it is right".[10] There is no source of value other than the ego, the subject. Therefore, right must be an entirely subjective question. "I decide whether it is the *right thing* in me; there is no right *outside* me."[11] To Stirner, there are neither natural rights nor social or historical rights, but only egoistic rights.[12]

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* Self-sacrificing people are "wholly absorbed" in one ruling passion, he writes. *The Ego and His Own,* p. 76.

Stirner sometimes seems to give a kind of moral justification of his "might makes right" position. For example, he suggests that any external authority which might attempt on the basis of generalizations to judge one's needs will be unable to decide them as correctly as the unique individual. "What 'man' requires furnishes by no means a scale for measuring me and my needs; for I may have use for less or more. I must rather have so much as I am competent to appropriate."[13] He appears in this passage to be appealing to a notion of the fairness of egoistic choice based on one's more extensive knowledge of his or her own needs. Yet if he admits any objective standard by which to judge these needs, it is obvious that in at least some cases, given human fallibility and capacity for self-deception, others will be in a better position to make an impartial and accurate assessment. However, he has no intention of following this line of reasoning. "Needs" are not to be determined by any objective criterion, but rather, as he states at the end of the passage, by power at the service of egoistic will.

At this point the question should be raised as to whether

Stirner's position should in fact be labelled nihilism, rather than ethical egoism. Paterson's recent study of Stirner takes nihilism as the most distinctive characteristic of his thought. As he writes, "for the nihilistic egoist, nothing is to be believed or endured, apart from the unique individual himself, who is himself a nothingness".[14] Furthermore, he suggests that it is incorrect to maintain that Stirner accepts any ethical position, presumably even ethical egoism. Since for Stirner "moral obligations of *any* kind are no more than hollow verbal devices for dividing a man from his own best interests", he is an "amoralist".[15]

Dealing with these contentions raises complex problems of interpretation and definition. It is true that Stirner rejects all values which are not created by the individual ego. As a result, he is irreconcilably opposed to moral codes. He is indeed an amoralist, since he refuses to take "the moral point of view", which would entail objective obligations which would sometimes conflict with his egoistic interest as he defines it. Yet I think that in spite of his rejection of the moral standpoint of impartiality and objectivity, he is taking an ethical position, and accepting the validity of some sort of values. While the ego is in his view "nothing", in the sense of nothing enduring, it is also everything, in the sense of being the source of all values. He believes that the values which are created by the ego are worthwhile, and thus it seems invalid to call him a nihilist, in the sense of one who lives in a world without value. It would seem that "nihilism" in the deepest sense would refer to the outlook of one who has felt all values dissolve—who feels that even the ego itself is without significance or worth. It is the ultimate despair or hopelessness. It is true that Stirner is a nihilist in the sense that he rejects all objective values. Yet much of his writing shows that his egoistic values perform for him the same function of giving meaning and direction to existence as do objective or transcendent values for others.

What, it might be asked, is the result for society of Stirner's egoistic system of values? Considering the foundations of his ethical egoism—a plurality of egos governed only by their own wills, seeking their own welfare, ideally unfettered by concern for moral laws or for other individuals, having no duties and recognizing no right except power—the result is not surprising. In Stirner's opinion, society must become openly what it already is implicitly, a struggle for power, a war of all against all. As he advises, "Take hold, and take what you require. With this, the war of all against all is declared. I alone decide what I will have".[16] There is no source of arbitration other than the ego—no God, no laws of history, no society can decide what is just. Therefore, there is only one solution, that all egos should act egoistically, and let force* decide what is right and just. As for Stirner himself, he is quite willing to accept this as the solution to the decision-making problem of society. Although he will "cover his property with his shield", he will also at the same time "look forward smilingly at the outcome of the battle, smilingly lay the shield on the corpses of [his] thoughts and [his] faith, smilingly triumph when [he] is beaten".[17] Somehow, he feels that he still is "the owner of all", even in such defeat.[18] Both his idea that he can triumph through defeat, and his advocacy of a system which may result in his defeat seem quite contradictory to his egoistic presuppositions, as will be discussed later. But even beyond this, there seem to be certain inherent contradictions in an egoistic ethical system.

A basic question must be asked of the ethical egoist. Given that egoism means the conscious pursuit of one's own interest, there are two possibilities open to an egoist. One may, first, hold that one must only pursue one's own self-interest, and have no concern for the actions of others, except as they contribute to one's own welfare. In this case one is a personal ethical egoist. Or one may hold that every ego should pursue its own interest, in which case one is an impersonal ethical egoist.† Stirner sounds at various times as if he supports each of these theories. His first words in *The Ego and His Own* are that "all things are nothing to me",[19] but soon he begins to concern himself with other egos, asking of them "why will you not take courage now to really make *yourselves* the central point and the main thing altogether?"[20]

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* As will be seen, in his ideal society physical force is to be superceded by another kind of opposition.

† Hospers, p. 159. I am indebted to Hospers for the terminology.

It certainly seems contradictory for Stirner to support both personal and impersonal ethical egoism, since he cannot advocate both that only his own interest should be pursued to the exclusion of all others, and also that each ego's welfare should be sought, apparently even to his own detriment. But even if he could decide between these two alternatives he would still be involved in contradictions from which he cannot free himself. For example, he might consistently opt for personal ethical egoism and hold that only his individual interest should be considered. This means that he should seek his own welfare and that he should try to influence others to promote his welfare instead of their own; that he should be a conscious egoist but encourage others to act altruistically toward him. But what basis could he have to justify this privileged position for himself? Why should only one ego's interest be of significance, and all others "be nothing"? As Hospers suggests, he might use either the superiority of his ego over others or its uniqueness.[21] But if he claims that his ego is superior he must give criteria on which to judge superiority. Presumably, some other egos meet virtually any criterion which might be laid down for superiority. Thus, he is driven to the one criterion which no other ego can fulfil—that his ego is uniquely itself. "You are distinguished beyond other men not by being man, but because you are a 'unique' man."[22] It is true that no other ego is exacly like Stirner's ego. Yet all other egos can claim the same distinction. Since all have the quality of uniqueness, Stirner might then seem more consistent when he accepts impersonal ethical egoism. But how can he consistently support such a position? If Stirner himself is an egoist, he cannot advocate that which would work against his interest. As Singer writes, "if an egoist is someone interested solely in his own advantage, and in that of others only in so far as it is conducive to his own, then an egoist is certainly the last person in the world who could will egoism to be universal law".[23] Paterson also notes this inconsistency in regard to Stirner himself, commenting that in encouraging others to become egoists, he loses "the crucial advantage accruing to the man who is not bound by moral considerations in his dealings with men who are".[24] The egoist, then, should not be concerned that others do what is in their interest but only that they do what is in his or her interest. It is questionable on what grounds such an egoist could justify advocacy that others be egoists. If Stirner says that it is because universal egoism would maximize happiness, or achieve some similar result, he falls into altruism. If he maintains that universal egoism is the system which best serves his own interest (a highly questionable position which he does seem to hold) then he justifies impersonal ethical egoism by personal ethical egoism. He is still left with the contradictions of the latter position.

Impersonal ethical egoism leads to several other problems. It may produce a situation in which an action can be at the same time both morally right and morally wrong. For the same action can be in the egoistic interest of one individual but against the interest of another. This paradoxical condition does not involve a contradiction but it does show that the impersonal ethical egoist must forsake the possibility of finding an objective moral solution to moral disputes.[25] What does seem to be contradictory is that Stirner, after asserting the subjectivity of all moral values, tries to reintroduce objectivity through his doctrine that might makes right. Why, one may ask, is power an acceptable arbiter of what is right, when each ego has an equal claim to have right on its side? Since each ego is the final judge of its own conduct, there would seem to be no reason for the ego to admit that a force directed successfully against its interest is justified. To be consistent, Stirner should hold that the ego's own interest is always right, and threats to that interest are wrong. Problems such as this can be traced back to a basic tension in his thought between his egoism and voluntarism on the one hand and his materialism on the other. The former directs him to a set of internal, subjective values while the latter encourages him to look for external, objective realities. The two are often not adequately reconciled.

A final contradiction involved in impersonal ethical egoism might be mentioned. When egoists like Stirner advocate all pursuing their own interest, they are recommending actions which are contradictory to one another. In their proposal, they advise everyone to get the better of everyone else. But everyone cannot do this, for quite often getting the better of another means the other getting the worst of it, the interest of the latter being damaged. For example, given the existence of a certain amount of property of a certain type, the more one individual acquires, the less there is for others to possess.[26] Stirner's advice is therefore of an odd sort: he advises everyone to try to be a complete egoist, knowing that the success of some in the endeavour will mean the failure of others, presumably including himself to a degree.

Stirner attempts to avoid some of the contradictions in his thought by his contention that a universal pursuit of self-interest will lead to the greatest benefit for each individual ego, including himself. This impersonal ethical egoism would again find its justification in personal ethical egoism, which is, again, subject to a number of objections. But furthermore this theory involves the extravagant claim that no other ethical system could possibly produce greater benefits for any single ego. As has been mentioned, a condition in which an ego treats others egoistically but is treated by others altruistically would seem to be clearly more to that ego's benefit.

Stirner's error is his excessive faith in the benefits of universal self-interest. He was, it might be recalled, the German translator of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, and apparently he shared some of its presuppositions.[27] He, like Smith, seems to think that if individuals are left to pursue their own self-interest, an "invisible hand" can be trusted to produce order out of the expected chaos. It might even be suggested that Stirner's thought is the application of the underlying assumptions of capitalist economics to every area of human existence, and that his philosophy is the *reductio ad absurdum* of classical capitalism, with its social atomism, individualism, materialism, and exhaltation of competitiveness.* These themes become especially dominant in his discussion of the questions of freedom and the union of egoists. His treatment of these topics, which must now be considered, suggests some of the social implications of his ethical egoism.

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* This is not, of course, to say that Stirner approved of capitalist society as he found it. To the contrary, he had nothing but contempt for such half-hearted and inconsistent dedication to egoism. His relationship to capitalism is a much more subtle one than that implied in the Marxist claim that he expressed petit-bourgeois values. This will be discussed further.

CHAPTER IV

FREEDOM AND OWNNESS

The concept of freedom is a rather difficult one to deal with, especially because of the various and often conflicting senses in which the word has been used, both in popular usage and by philosophers and political theorists. It is therefore desirable at the outset to briefly analyse the concept. This will be of assistance in the interpretation of Stirner's position on the issue of freedom, which is a crucial one in his philosophy.

In his essay "Two Concepts of Liberty", Isaiah Berlin divides concepts of freedom into two classes, those which are negative and those which are positive. Concepts of negative freedom emphasize that freedom is limited when one is "prevented from attaining [some] goal by human beings".[1] Thus, when one is able to attempt to carry out one's will without being interfered with by the physical force of others, one is free. It is freedom from coercion.

Positive freedom, on the other hand, is concerned with "the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master".[2] Berlin is a bit unclear here, since negative freedom is also concerned with this in a way. What he means is that positive freedom is concerned with achieving a certain goal, with being master of the situation. It is not merely freedom from interference, but freedom to reach an end. At one extreme, this type of freedom still seems negative, as in its Stoic form, in which freedom is the achievement of *ataraxia* through "resistance to (or escape from) unrealizable desire".[3] On the other hand, positive freedom has been transformed by modern liberal ideology into something more socially oriented, the achievement of social and economic goals such as education, economic welfare, and social privileges.* In political thought, positive freedom has been concerned with the "notion of self-direction or self-control" but this has usually meant "liberation by reason".[4] Berlin mentions Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Marx, among others, as advocates of this type of freedom. It might be added that positive definitions of freedom are evident when freedom is construed as adherence to tradition, as in conservative thought, or as participation in the authoritarian state, as in Fascist ideology. In all these cases it has meant the definition of freedom in terms of some specific goal which is to be sought. One who reaches the goal is declared free, one who fails to reach it is unfree.

It is clear that neither the negative nor the positive doctrines of freedom, as they have been traditionally formulated, are adequate, if taken separately, as an account of the nature of freedom. Each points out an important element of freedom, but both overlook equally significant aspects of the problem. One is in a real sense unfree if one is suppressed by physical force, but is one really free merely because such force is diminished or removed? The removal of coercion does not assure that freedom will be anything more than a mere empty potentiality. Physical, social, economic, and intellectual barriers may still exist. Positive freedom in its modern liberal form validly signifies that one is free if one is able to reach a goal; that is one is free to reach that goal. But in identifying freedom with particular specified goals, its theorists overlook a third sense of freedom in which it implies that the goals which are reached are self-determined. Furthermore, an emphasis on the positive side of freedom sometimes leads to the seeming contradiction of forcing people to be free.†

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* See especially Thomas Hill Green, *Principles of Political Obligation* (Ann Arbor: Un. of Michigan Press, 1967).

† See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Chicago: Gateway, 1954), pp. 26-7. He discusses two types of positive freedom, "civil liberty" and "moral freedom". He explains that "whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the entire body politic, which is

Anarchism is the one major political theory which has attempted to synthesize the values of negative and positive freedom into a single, more comprehensive view of human liberty. In its emphasis on community and equality, it recognizes the importance of self-realization through participation, and of the ability of all to share in the benefits of society's labour. These are the values associated with positive freedom. On the other hand, in stressing individual liberty and the abolition of coercive force, it upholds the importance of negative freedom equally. And finally, by emphasizing the necessity of individuality and personal autonomy, it shows a concern that freedom entail authentic, voluntary choice on the part of individuals, rather than mindless parroting of the dictates of arbitrary authority.

The concepts of negative and positive freedom are useful in analyzing Stirner's view of freedom and relating it to the history of political theory. He has very little to say about what has been called negative freedom. In general, his view seems to be that it is of little importance in itself. As will be discussed further, he thinks that if his egoism were adopted by society there would be a great reduction in the amount of coercion used by individuals against others. Yet, this non-coercive situation is not the goal, but merely an effect of reaching the goal. Moreover, he admits that if his ethical principles were adopted by society, even though there would be an increase in liberty in the sense of non-coercion, a certain degree of this negative freedom would still have to be given up. But, of course, such freedom is not really the object which the egoist seeks.[5]

According to Stirner, all people act with the motive of promoting their own welfare. If they desire freedom, they desire it because they believe it is in their interest. To make freedom itself the goal, he says, would be to lapse into religion and idealism, to make an idea something "sacred".* What is necessary is that freedom should be

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only another way of saying that his fellows shall force him to be free" (p. 25).

* Compare Stirner's description of the sacred to that of Rudolf

subordinated to the ego. One should consciously (and effectively) do what one does in any case unconsciously (but often ineffectively)—pursue freedom only insofar as it is in one's own egoistic interest. Negative freedom is not an ultimate value on the basis of this egoistic criterion. For example, one is not really free just because one is not physically punished for holding a certain opinion. One holding an opinion may be enslaved by that opinion itself. A thought may not be imposed by a coercive authority, but the thought itself may be an alien authority. This is true if it does not arise out of one's own free, conscious decision, but rather is received from society as a prejudice. It is something passively and uncritically accepted, not having the personal significance which comes from a choice of the unfettered ego. This is the error of negative freedom, according to Stirner: it assures that one will not be enslaved by physical coercive force, but it does not guarantee that one will not be dominated by coercive thoughts which may be accepted on the basis of authorities such as custom, tradition, mores, laws, religion, and philosophy. As Stirner writes, "So men shall become free, entirely free, free from all constraint! From all constraint, really from all. Are they never to put constraint on themselves any more?"[6]

If Stirner is critical of negative freedom, he is just as unwilling to side with the usual positive theories. The problem with theories of positive freedom, as Stirner correctly contends, is that they are usually concerned with a specific goal in terms of which freedom is defined, and fail to consider the manner in which an individual may accept or reject such a goal. Positive freedom is "limited freedom, freedom within certain limits".[7] If freedom is merely defined in positive terms such as political participation, obedience to moral law or custom, or acceptance of religion, as Stirner believes was done in bourgeois liberalism of his day, it becomes an empty freedom. No concern is taken for the spirit in which the decision in favour of these values is

Otto. See *The Ego and His Own,* pp. 37, 73, and Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford Un. Press, 1958).

made, for the concern is only for "the spirit of morality, legality, piety, and the fear of God".[8]

Stirner's assault on positive freedom falls most heavily on what has been termed "moral freedom". He rejects the contention, which he attributes to Goethe and Hegel, that "he who only serves the cause, 'devotes himself entirely to it', has the true freedom".[9] This view, which he believes to be the outlook of the bourgeoisie, equates the "obedient servant" with the free man, and "moral behaviour" with freedom.[10] Freedom comes to mean merely doing one's duty, regardless of the motivation for doing it, whether or not the choice to do it is a fully conscious and uncoerced one. Stirner makes this particular criticism in one of his early essays. He attacks von Stein, who writes of "free development in a moral direction" as the ethical ideal, equating the "moral direction" with doing one's duty.[11] In Stirner's opinion, this type of view overlooks several important elements of a free action, such as "spontaneous direction", and the "independence and sovereignty of the will".[12] In short, Stirner is pointing out that a choice cannot be called free by merely looking at that which is chosen; the way in which the choice is made must also be considered.

This criticism again appears in Stirner's discussion of political freedom. Many theorists have accepted the view that political participation should be considered an important freedom. Apologists for democracy and liberalism in particular have always held that even if one's will is not carried out, the mere fact that one has a part in the decision-making process is a guarantee of freedom. It is to Stirner's credit that he saw through this fallacy, and apprehended that all exercise of sovereign power consists of either actual or potential tyranny. This must be discussed further in connection with Stirner's view of the state. At this point it will merely be mentioned that he shows that abstract political liberty is not synonymous with real individual liberty. Many believe that they are enslaved when a sovereign monarch takes away any of their personal freedom, but few think so when a sovereign majority acts in the same way. The fact that one "participates", even if one's will is never carried out, is thought to negate in some way the loss of concrete individual freedom. This political liberty, according to Stirner, is a second phase of Protestantism, an "independence of intermediaries" in a political, rather than a religious sphere.[13] The result is merely freedom to participate and nothing more, rather than freedom in some broader sense, as is usually claimed by its defenders.

One way in which Stirner phrases his criticism of theories of both negative and positive freedom is that they have been "the desire for a *particular* freedom".[14] In pursuing any particular freedom its advocates have at the same time destroyed the possibility for other types of freedom. "Political liberalism" (classical liberalism) establishes political freedom by abolishing inequality before the law, but leaves the individual unfree against the power of the state. "Social liberalism" (socialism or communism) establishes economic freedom by abolishing inequality of property, but the individual is left unfree in regard to his or her ability to hold and acquire property. "Humane liberalism" (humanism as propounded by Feuerbach and Bauer) establishes freedom from prejudice by overthrowing traditional theism, but it replaces it with a bondage to a new idol, humanity.* In his early writings, Stirner reaches the conclusion that in spite of these difficulties with various positions advocating "freedom", a valid concept of freedom can be developed. He argues that one is only free if one acts with self-determination, self-awareness, and free-will.[15] Unfortunately, he does not develop this point, and these criteria are left unexplained.

While Stirner seems tempted at times to strongly emphasize the importance of individual freedom, it must ultimately take a subordinate place in his thought, in view of his psychological and ethical egoism. Since all one does is ultimately for the sake of the ego, and since one should make a conscious motive of self-interest also, freedom must be kept in its place as a value subordinate to the ego. If not, it becomes another enslaving idea. One should not act in order to expand freedom in general, nor to secure one's own freedom, but rather one should choose freedom only as a means of serving one's own interest. And Stirner thinks that at times it is not in one's interest to be free. Often one must surrender some freedom for greater well-being, as people in fact willingly do.[16] Given that one's egoistic welfare is always the final goal of one's action, "why not choose the I himself as beginning, middle, and end?"[17] The choice of the ego means placing another value above freedom, the value of *Eigenheit* or ownness.

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* Stirner, *The Ego and His Own.* Strangely, Brazill refers to Stirner's position as a kind of "humanism" (p. 223).

Stirner is not entirely clear about the relation between freedom and ownness. At times he seems to treat the two as radically different, even mutually exclusive. At other times he implies that ownness itself is really a type of freedom. The problem arises from his desire to distinguish his concept from the concepts of freedom current in his own time, particularly the idealistic ones, and to escape the confusion which the term involves. "Must we then, because freedom betrays itself as a Christian ideal, give it up? No, nothing is to be lost, freedom no more than the rest; but it is to become our own, and in the form of freedom it cannot."[18] He admits that ownness is related to concepts of freedom, yet, in rejecting the term, he attempts to emphasize the differences, rather than the similarities between the two concepts.

Stirner does, in fact, make a number of comparisons between freedom and ownness. He claims, as has been mentioned, that freedom can become an abstraction which misleads the ego, while ownness is something concrete. It is "a description of the owner",[19] a description of the ego itself and its property. He further explains that "I am free from what I am *rid* of, owner of what I have in my *power* or what I *control*".[20] In identifying ownness with power and contrasting it to negative freedom, he shows its close relation to traditional positive concepts of freedom. However, it is distinguished from those concepts in that it defines ownership in terms of *anything* which one owns, while positive freedom is usually defined in terms of power to do or have certain specific things. Furthermore, freedom, whether positive or negative, is necessarily limited "by my not being able to carry out my will on another object, be this other something without will, like a rock, or something with will, like a government, an individual".[21] But ownness can only be limited by one's own choice. One owns what one has the power or capacity to possess, and anything which is involuntarily lost, is not really one's own. It follows from this that ownness is something which can be destroyed only by the ego itself, never by others. "I deny my ownness when in presence of another I give myself up, give way, desist, submit; therefore by *loyalty, submission*."[22] Physical barriers to one's will may be considerable, but Stirner correctly sees that internal restraints are the more significant ones. He notes that it means little to say that one has freedom—whether it be non-coercion or ability to reach a goal—if one's choices are determined by an external authority, like religion or government, which forbids one to consider some alternatives for thought or action. Thus he concludes that "all freedom is essentially—self-liberation".[23]

At this point Stirner seems to be touching upon something which has been mentioned as a central concern of libertarian theory: personal autonomy. Yet the idea of ownness means more than the ability to make an unfettered choice—it also involves the concept of power. He says that "my freedom becomes complete only when it is my *might*; but by this I cease to be a merely free man and become an own man".[24] In this connection, he introduces another concept which is central to his thought; that which is owned, or that over which the ego has power—property.

Stirner's discussion of property involves several elements which seem on the surface to be contradictory. At times he clearly equates egoistic property with that which is actually possessed. "Let me say to myself, what my might reaches to is my property; and let me claim as property everything that I feel strong enough to attain; and let me extend my actual property as far as *I* entitle, that is, empower, myself to take."[25] Yet he writes in another place that "I do not step shyly back from your property, but look upon it always as *my* property, in which I need to 'respect' nothing".[26] Here, in apparent contradiction to his former view, he seems to hold that everything is the property of the ego. Yet the two statements are not difficult to reconcile. Ultimately, for Stirner, property is equated with actual possession. One's property is that over which one has power, and beyond that, "all things are nothing" to one. He writes elsewhere, "so long as I assert myself as holder, I am the proprietor of the thing; if it gets away from me again, no matter by what power . . . then the property is extinct".[27] No one, he adds, is without property for "even the most abject of slaves"[28] has one thing—the ego. Beyond this, the ego can look upon everything as its property, that is, it can see everything as a possibility for ownership. But if it fails to attain power over an object, then it must admit that the object is not its property. It must be satisfied with ownership of itself, and whatever else it may possess.

At this point, Stirner, the philosopher of ruthless egoism and power, seems to approach a position of almost Stoic resignation. "Of all things some are in our power, and others are not in our power . . . if you think that only your own belongs to you, and that what is another's is indeed another's . . . no harm can touch you,"[29] says Epictetus. "I 'sacrifice' only that which does not stand in my power, that is, I 'sacrifice' nothing at all"[30] says Stirner in the same spirit. It is this which puts the egoist in such a privileged position, since he or she will always have the one thing which is of most value to him or her—the self. The egoist can therefore take everything else lightly—"with humour", as Stirner puts it. One can vigorously fight for possession of things and ideas, but yet never fear loss, for one cannot lose what is most important. As he states in a passage quoted in part earlier, "doubtless, as owner of thoughts, I shall cover my property with my shield, just as I do not, as owner of things, willingly let everybody help himself to them; but at the same time I shall look forward smilingly to the outcome of the battle, smilingly lay the shield on the corpses of my thoughts and my faith, smilingly triumph when I am beaten".[31]

This position certainly does have the advantage of protecting one from the vicissitudes of fortune, yet the price for this protection is considerable. It means that one cannot allow oneself to become deeply involved with either persons or things, that everything except one's own ego must be thought dispensable. Such a life, it must be admitted, is much less dangerous than most, but many would also contend that it is less interesting and less meaningful, lacking those experiences which arise out of commitment, co-operation, and community. Furthermore, there seems to be a contradiction between this Stoic outlook and the tenor of much of Stirner's writing. One tendency in his thought is to represent the ego as a competitive, struggling, outwardly directed being, intent on using other egos and all things only for its own welfare. Its highest goal is to enjoy, to reap the benefits of its exploitation of the world. But Stirner tends to develop a quite different conception of the ego in the passages just quoted. The ego becomes something content with remaining within itself, it is able to endure frustration of its will, and it has an aloofness from the world. Stirner is correct in proposing that, given that all cannot succeed equally in exploitation, some egoists might find consolation in being content with the limited property which they have in their own egos. Yet the ease with which he thinks the egoist will be able to take such a standpoint seems to be a rationalization in view of the acquisitive nature which he usually attributes to the ego.

In spite of these serious problems with Stirner's concept of ownness, and despite the fact that he wishes to distinguish sharply between that concept and the concept of freedom, his discussion on the matter has a considerable amount to contribute to a comprehensive theory of freedom. He points out an important aspect of freedom which must not be overlooked if all dimensions of the question are to be considered. Concepts of negative freedom stress the important fact that absence of coercion is a significant part of freedom. Some concepts of positive freedom emphasize the equally important consideration that one cannot be free unless one has the ability to obtain certain things which are required for a complete, fully human life (e.g., adequate food, housing, education, medical care, participation in the community). Stirner hints at a third aspect of freedom which is related closely to both of the others. This is freedom as the ability to act out of truly free choice. It is negative in that it requires that no one authority claim a privileged position as an unquestioned source of truth. And it is positive since it is not a mere absence of external control, but can exist only through a positive ability on the part of the individual to make meaningful, critical, unprejudiced decisions.* It might be observed that Stirner's application of this principle defeats its purpose, since he seems to have a preconceived idea of what an unprejudiced decision must be: a decision on behalf of a mythical "true, egoistic interest". Yet for one who rejects Stirner's extreme egoism, his thoughts on this matter are useful in shedding light on an important element of the concept of freedom, even if these implications were not seen fully by Stirner himself.

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* One of the best discussions of personal autonomy in Western philosophy appears in the writings of William Godwin. For Godwin's defence of the right of private judgement, see his major work, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), and my book *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin,* forthcoming from Princeton University Press.

CHAPTER V

STATE, SOCIETY AND THE UNION OF EGOISTS

Through his concept of "ownness", Stirner attempts to establish an egoistic theory of the relation between the ego and the other. In doing so, he implies that his egoism is a philosophy which has consequences not merely at the level of the single individual, but also at the social level, in the realm of interaction between egos. Although he does not go to any great lengths to construct an egoistic social theory, he does give some hints about what one should entail, and he presents some general criticisms of the existing social system. He attacks above all the modern concept of the state and the theory of sovereignty, which has been used to justify the state's existence. To some degree he also criticizes the society in which such a state develops, though his distinction between state and society is not very marked. On the positive side, he goes only so far as to vaguely sketch his proposals for an alternative society in which the existing state and society would be replaced by a more openly egoistic arrangement.

It is the state, above all, that bears the brunt of Stirner's attack. He observes that the state has grown into such a vast, ubiquitous entity that many are led to accept it without question. An element in one's environment, no matter how artificial, can become so pervasive that its presence is accepted as an unalterable fact of nature. So, says Stirner, is the case with the state. But it has achieved even more than acceptance, he notes, it has become a "fixed idea", an idea which is sacred and not open to question.[1] He urges that we should not only stop idolizing the state, but also bring into question its very existence.

Stirner finds that the theory of the state comes into direct conflict with his own set of values. He says that the bourgeois concept of the state makes the state itself the true individual, and gives the ego an existence only as a part of the state.[2] This, of course, is the reverse of his own doctrine, which sees the individual ego as the only ultimate reality. The bourgeois state, he says, places the general interest above all, and abolishes the individual egoistic interest which he sees as the only real one.[3] While he holds that only the particular is in any way real, the acceptance of the state means placing the individual under a generality.[4] Theories of the state demand that the state be accepted as an organism of which the individual is a part. But the ego is the only true organism, and the acceptance of the organic state destroys the real organic individual. "Its condition as a 'natural growth', its organism, demands that my nature do not grow freely, but be cut to fit it."[5]

In consequence of these basic conflicts between Stirner's outlook and the implication of statism, he comes to see the state as the embodiment of all he abhors. The state is "an enemy and murderer of ownness",[6] since it denies priority to the ego and its property, giving itself ultimate power and ownership. It is "a spirit that would be adored in spirit and in truth",[7] since it claims independence from and superiority to the ego, and demands its allegiance. And it "exerts moral influence, dominates my spirit, drives away my ego to put itself in its place as 'my true ego' ",[8] since it really aims at the annihilation of the moral individuality of the ego and the absorption of the ego into itself.

In his attack upon the state, Stirner enters into a criticism of its ultimate theoretical foundation, the theory of sovereignty. This theory maintains that in every state there is a supreme law making power, and that only the sovereign, the exerciser of this power, can put limitations on the use of it in making laws. As Bodin, the originator of the modern theory of sovereignty, writes, "only he is sovereign who, after God, acknowledges no one greater than himself".[9] Whatever physical limitations may restrain the sovereign, legally it is omnipotent. Stirner sees a conflict here with his own views. Sovereignty means that one will be given a status of superiority over all others, that all are expected to subordinate their wills to the sovereign's. But for Stirner every will has a claim to sovereignty. Nothing is forbidden and there are no sacred things over which the egoistic will cannot attempt to gain power. The state and sovereignty can only exist if one will is looked upon as the only legitimate one. "States last only so long as there is a *ruling will* and this will is looked upon as tantamount to the own will."[10] But there is no basis for placing any will in this privileged position; such a condition can exist only if the subject ego allows itself to be convinced (and convinced without evidence, according to Stirner) that there is a sovereign power to which it owes allegiance.

The question of the nature of the sovereign will raises some important questions for Stirner. Theorists of sovereignty write as if there were some "will of the State" which can be distinguished from the will of those constituting or controlling the state. Radical political theory, in both its Marxist and anarchist forms, has usually called into question this abstract idea of will (along with the concept of the neutral state, which is usually linked to it). Stirner, who claims to reduce all abstractions to their underlying material reality, would be expected to do likewise. Yet, as Marx pointed out, he allows the abstraction of the state to stand, even if he retains it only as an object of attack. He is correct in showing that the state depends on the existence of a ruling will, but he fails to understand fully that this will is not the will of some independent entity known as the state, but rather that of those who are in control of state power.

Stirner often seems oblivious to the fact that the state is used to protect the interests of certain groups in society and to exploit others. "The State has an interest only in being itself rich; whether Michael is rich and Peter poor is alike to it; Peter might also be rich and Michael poor. It looks on indifferently as one grows poor and the other rich, unruffled by this alternation. As *individuals* they are really equal before its face. . . . Through property, with which it rewards the individuals, it tames them; but this remains *its* property, and every one has the usufruct of it so long as he bears in himself the ego of the State. . . ."[11] In such passages Stirner produces a mirror image of the classical liberal state: instead of a neutrally protective state, it is a neutrally exploitative one. But in neither case is there a recognition of the state as a tool for the domination of some by others.

In his discussion of economic classes, Stirner seems to have some awareness of the function of the state in economic exploitation, although he never develops a fully critical perspective on the issue. He notes that the bourgeoisie "developed itself in the struggle against the privileged classes";[12] yet he ignores (in the same paragraph) the economic element in bourgeois ideology. It is "nothing else than the thought that the State is all in all, the true man, and that the individual's human value consists in being a citizen of the State".[13] Yet we know that the bourgeois citizen has no trouble in seeing the authoritarian nature of "proletarian" states, and is somehow blind only to the faults of states which defend his or her own class interests.

At one point Stirner seems to recognize fully the class basis of the state. He remarks that "the class of labourers . . . remains a power hostile to this State, this State of possessors, this 'citizen kingship'. Its principle, labour, is not recognized as to its *value*; it is exploited, a *spoil* of the possessors, the enemy. . . . The State rests on the—*slavery of labour*. If *labour* becomes free, the State is lost".[14] Paradoxically, Stirner shifts in this passage from his usual neglect of the economic basis of the state to a position which gives it an *entirely* economic foundation. He must therefore be credited with having some insight of the class basis for the state, although he fails to integrate this insight into his overall view of the state. Furthermore, he never takes the final step, which is made in later anarchist theory, to the analysis of the state as a mechanism for numerous kinds of domination, including not only economic, but also social, racial, religious, sexual, and generational forms.

In his discussion of sovereignty, Stirner correctly recognizes its basis in coercion. The existence of a sovereign power requires first, the widespread acceptance of its legitimacy by society, which he sees as the forfeiture of "own" will to the ruling will. And further, it requires the use of the threat of coercion or actual force by the sovereign in cases in which its will is not carried out. He sees this aspect of sovereignty as the state's use of sanctioned violence as opposed to the non-sanctioned violence of individuals. The state uses its "supreme might . . . against the individual and his self-will. The State practises 'violence', the individual must not do so. The State's behaviour is violence, and it calls its violence 'law'; that of the individual, 'crime'."[15] Stirner's argument here is somewhat unusual. Many anti-statists would conclude from what has been stated so far that if violence or coercion is immoral, and if law is merely another form of violence, then law is also immoral and should not be considered legitimate. Stirner, however, does not have a moral objection (though he has a pragmatic one) to the use of physical force as a decision-making process. He argues that since law is merely another form of violence with no more foundation than any other form, the individual should have no scruples about using violence to "overcome the State's violence when he thinks that the State is not above him, but he is above the State".[16]

Defenders of the theory of sovereignty have usually either been unaware of the weaknesses of their position or else have resorted to mystical defences like theories of divine right (of kings, majorities, etc.). Some, however, have seen the inconsistencies in the theory, and have attempted to formulate a more solid defence. Such defences sometimes consist in an effort to show that sovereignty rests ultimately on consent, and is therefore not a mere rationalization for brute force. The most common arguments of this type are based on theories of the social contract and democracy. One significant part of Stirner's thought is his suggestion of how to deal with these arguments.

Stirner points out that if one were so generous as to grant the social contract theories that the members of society actually have in some way entered into a contract, the conclusion that they are enslaved would still not be avoided. A society which rejects slavery will necessarily reject the procedure of one selling oneself into slavery. "If one were even to conceive the case that every individual in the people had expressed the same will, and hereby a complete 'collective will' had come into being, the matter would still remain the same. Would I not be bound today and henceforth to my will of yesterday? My will would in this case be *frozen.* Wretched *stability*! My creature—to wit, a particular expression of will—would have become my commander." Thus the state makes one at best "a bondsman of himself".[17] If this argument is applied to the theory that a real or fictitious contract by one generation is binding on all the members of a later generation, the result is even more conclusive. And if the principle of contract is recognized as the most justified method of decision-making, contract should not be the mechanism for only one original decision, but should be used in all the on-going processes in which decisions must be made.

Democratic theory attempts to justify sovereignty on grounds similar to those of social contract theory. It holds that since all have a voice in deciding an issue, all should be willing to obey the decision, whatever it may be. Laws are binding on all, the argument goes, for laws are made by all. But, as Stirner realized, the majority is not equivalent to "all". In a democracy, the sovereign is not everyone, but the majority which has the state apparatus, or government, under its control (assuming that majority rule is a possibility at all on the level of the nation-state). An individual whose will does not correspond to that of the majority is in the same position as one whose will differs from the king's in a monarchy. Stirner discusses this subject in his attack on Edgar Bauer, who writes in the *Liberalen Bestrebungen* that "in the free state there is no government".[18] Stirner replies that "this surely means that the people, when it is the *sovereign*, does not let itself be conducted by a superior authority. Is it perchance different in absolute monarchy? Is there *there* for the *sovereign*, perchance, a government standing over him?"[19] There can in fact be no free state, for the foundation of the state is sovereignty, and the meaning of sovereignty is domination.

Most of what Stirner says of the state he believes to apply equally to society as a whole. He does not attempt to distinguish clearly between the two, and holds that both share certain essential properties. Had he seen the state as the political organization of society, and analyzed carefully the ways in which it differs from other kinds of social organization, he might have had a higher view of society. But by attributing the same qualities to both, he is forced to deny the possibility of the reform of society. It becomes the object of all the criticisms which he made of the state, and he therefore must advocate its overthrow also.

The objection which Stirner raises against both the state and society is that they are not products of the free creative choice of the individual ego, but are forced upon one without the conscious accord of one's will. "Our societies and States are without our making them, are united without our uniting, are predestined and established, or have an independent standing of their own, are indissolubly established against us egoists."[20] Because of the nature of society as a non-voluntary association, its has a number of objectionable characteristics. One does not use society for one's own benefit, but rather is employed by it for its welfare. It demands that one exist not as a single ego, but as part of an organic whole larger than oneself, and that one act not according to an unfettered will, but out of a sense of duty to that whole. The ego is not looked upon as the end but as a mere means, while society becomes the end, and is made into something sacred.[21]

There are two parts to Stirner's criticism of society. The first is that it contradicts reality—that it posits the totality as the ultimate reality, while the individual is fundamental. This criticism rests on a weak foundation, since, as has been shown, Stirner is not very convincing in his defence of the ontological priority of the individual ego. His second point of criticism is that a society in which the individual can preserve his or her freedom and individuality is not possible. He is not very persuasive on this point either. He does not bother to cope with the evidence that a great part of what has been included under the name "society" has been independent of the coercive power exercised through the state, and that individuals have participated in many social activities out of free choice and without a loss of individuality. It is not true that all interaction between human beings which preserves individual autonomy must be guided by conscious egoism. Kropotkin has shown that maximum individual freedom and maximum social co-operation are not only compatible but, when united, create the most productive condition for both the individual and the society.[22]

Stirner himself, it seems, may have in his later writings been coming around to a position which distinguishes between the state and society, and recognizes more possibilities for the latter. In his *Geschichte der Reaction* he makes a distinction between "social man" and "political man", and holds that when one rejects one's political position of servant or bondsman, one acts as a social being, creating a society independent of political rulers.[23] But nowhere in his writings does Stirner develop this idea of society (as distinguished from the state) being a force beneficial to the individual. On the whole, he sees both society and the state as being in opposition to the ego, and prefers to advocate an entirely different form of social organization which is to overturn both the state and society. He does not advocate that they be overturned by revolution, however. Instead, he proposes that egoists make use of insurrection (*Empörung*).[24] One should not, as in a revolution, seek to set up a new form of state or society, but rather one should reject both. When individuals withdraw to form an entirely different sort of association, these institutions will collapse, for "all States, constitutions, churches, have sunk by the *secession* of individuals".[25] The association into which they should enter he calls the union of egoists.

The primary characteristic of Stirner's union of egoists is that it arises out of truly voluntary action and from a genuine choice of those participating in it. It is not a group into which one is born or socialized, like society, but an association into which one enters out of one's own power. Since society lacks this element of free commitment and creative action, it is in essence static and lifeless, while the union is always dynamic and living, depending for its existence on continuing renewal through individual decisions. It is an "incessant self-uniting" while "society is crystallized", "come to a standstill, degenerated into a fixity"—in short, "dead".[26]

Although the union is dependent on voluntarism and free choice, it does not assure anyone absolute freedom, and is not, indeed, established with freedom as the final goal. Stirner goes so far as to make the statement that the fact "that a society (such as the society of the State) diminishes my liberty offends me little".[27] The reason for this astonishing statement is that he here continues to distinguish freedom from ownness, and to take the latter as the goal of the egoist. "Ownness I will not have taken from me,"[28] he explains. He reassures us that the union will indeed bring an increase in freedom, but he does not recommend it on this ground. "The union will assuredly offer a greater measure of liberty as well as . . . admit of being considered as 'a new liberty'; but nevertheless, it will still contain enough of unfreedom and involuntariness. For its object is not this liberty . . . but only ownness."[29] The union of egoists is an association in which people work together, not for the common welfare, or greatest happiness, but because of each individual's desire that he or she should own as much as is possible. The egoists in the union do not unite out of any altruistic motives but because "they are of themselves led to the point that they care best for their welfare if they *unite* with others. . . ."[30]

The purpose of the union of egoists is, then, to enable the egoists to develop their ownness (the quality of being in complete control of oneself and one's property), and to extend their sphere of ownership, or increase the number of things over which they have control. Since the type of union envisioned is based on the model of contract, Stirner's relation to Adam Smith and classical capitalist economics comes to the surface. He wishes to apply the assumptions underlying the economics of that tradition to all spheres of human existence. The result is that a standpoint of rational self-interest is, in his view, to govern not only the market-place, but society as a whole. Adam Smith writes that "it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner but from their regard to their self-interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our necessities, but of their advantages".[31] This is the sort of basis which Stirner gives to his union of egoists. A rational egoist realizes that he or she can benefit by as large a number of others as possible contributing to the fulfilment of his or her desires. Egoists with like interests therefore enter into a union in which they selfishly co-operate to produce what they mutually (yet individually) desire, so that each helps fulfil the needs of the others in return for having a greater number of his or her own demands met. The egoist is thus able to expand his or her property to a degree impossible to reach by acting in isolation.

The relationship which has been noted here between Stirner's union and some of the assumptions of classical capitalism should not obscure the fact that there are important differences between his position and historical capitalism. In fact, Stirner is as harsh a critic of capitalist factory labour as is Marx. Stirner's comments on the subject are similar to those which Marx was making at about the same time in his 1844 Manuscripts: "when everyone is to cultivate himself into man, condemning a man to *machine-like* labour amounts to the same thing as slavery. If a factory worker must tire himself to death twelve hours and more, he is cut off from becoming man. Every labour is to have the intent that the man be satisfied. Therefore, he must become a *master* in it, to be able to perform it in a totality."[32] When one only mechanically performs an isolated, routine task "his labour is nothing by itself, has no object in itself; he labours only into another's hands, and is *used* (exploited) by this other".[33] In addition, Stirner is contemptuous of the asceticism which underlies the capitalist outlook, since it conflicts with the hedonistic element of his egoism. "Restless acquisition does not let us take breath, take a calm *enjoyment*: we do not get the comfort of our possessions."[34] Under capitalist competition, labours "claim all our time and toil".[35] Furthermore, he notes that under capitalism, there is only an illusion of free competition. The individual usually finds that the means by which one can successfully compete are monopolized by a few.[36] The sacredness of private property is used to prevent the less advantaged from improving their position. But for Stirner, unlike the capitalists, property is not to be respected, and all are entitled to use all their power to improve their lot. He replaces capitalist competition with unrestrained egoistic competition.

In such a situation, an opposition is set up, but it is an opposition which is productive rather than destructive to those opposing one another. An egoist meets another "as an I *against* a You altogether different from me and in opposition to me".[37] But the opposition of uniques is unlike other oppositions, since it implies "nothing divisive or hostile".[38] Those in opposition meet out of neither love nor hatred, but from the cold calculation by each that a union would serve his or her interest. Stirner explicitly calls such a union a type of contract.[39]

In discussing this contractual relationship, he says that it is an arrangement in which the egoist loses nothing. "I 'sacrifice' only that which does not stand in my power, that is, I 'sacrifice' nothing at all."[40] Stirner's frequent over-optimism about egoism again comes out here. It is true that an egoist will not enter into a contract unless what is received is desired or needed more than what is surrendered. But this will only mean that "nothing is sacrificed" in a situation in which both parties are in an equal bargaining position. He recognizes that this condition is illusory under capitalism, but he has no reason to believe that it will exist under the union of egoists either. Presumably people will have advantages and disadvantages arising from differences in, for example, skills, capacities, and even luck. In a non-egoistic society people might superstitiously believe that they ought to make arrangements to assist those who are disadvantaged by such conditions beyond their control. Furthermore, they might even feel a duty to abide by the arrangements when it is not in their own egoistic interest. Under the union of egoists, on the other hand, such disadvantages are looked upon as an opportunity for exploitation and personal gain (provided, of course, that the exploiter has no personal interest in the welfare of the victim). Contracts will, of necessity, still be made; but they will certainly involve sacrifice on the part of some.

A great deal can be learned about Stirner's concept of the union from his discussion of love as a kind of egoistic relationship. As has been mentioned, he contends that all activities are egoistic, although the self-interested element may be either conscious or unconscious. He interprets love this way. "Unselfish mystical, or romantic love" is, beneath the surface, selfish, but it is "blind and crazy" because it is compulsive; one has no power to cast it aside in those cases in which it is not in one's best egoistic interest.[41] Stirner wants nothing to do with such love. Instead he wishes to have an openly selfish relation—the contractual relationship of egoistic union. In one of the most pathetic passages of *The Ego and His Own* he explains why, and he no doubt tells us something about the experience which underlies his own egoism: "I would rather be referred to men's selfishness than to their 'kindnesses', their mercy, pity, etc. The former demands *reciprocity* (as thou to me, so I to thee), does nothing 'gratis', and may be won and—*bought*. But with what shall I obtain the kindness? It is a matter of chance whether I am at the time having to do with a 'loving' person. The affectionate one's service can be had only by *begging*, be it by my lamentable appearance, by my need of help, my misery, my—*suffering*. What can I offer for his assistance? Nothing! I must accept it as a—present."[42] Stirner feels helpless when faced with the uncertainties of relying on human social instincts. He therefore looks instead (ironically) to the *security* found in the contractual relationship of the egoistic union.

According to Stirner, all egoists (and by that he means all people) would benefit by forming egoistic unions. He claims that all will have property under the union. He believes that it is only respect for property, the idea that property is in some way sacred, that enables some to have property while others are without it. Unions, he says, will "multiply the individual's means and secure his assailed property".[43] Since all have capacities of some type, they can, through union or contract, use these capacities to obtain property. As a consequence of this wider dispersion of property, poverty will disappear under the system of unions. Stirner seems to think, no doubt correctly, that it is impossible for the rich to maintain great inequality of wealth without the masses being convinced of the sacredness of property. If the poor free themselves of such illusions, they will see that they have the power to redistribute wealth, and will do so.* He recommends that workers who are dissatisfied with their wages use compulsion to change their situation. "The labourers who ask for higher pay are treated as criminals as soon as they want to *compel* it. What are they to do? Without compulsion they don't get it, and in compulsion the State sees a self-help, a determination of price by the ego, a genuine, free realization of value from his property, which it cannot admit of."[44] The workers, he contends, can achieve more equal compensation if they use such compulsion. He advises them to band together and refuse as a group to work unless they are paid to their satisfaction. And on the subject of strikebreaking, the egoist sounds like a proto-Wobbly: "if one puts in an appearance who takes less, then let him beware of us".[45] He is confident that through such egoistic unions, workers can protect their interest.

Stirner's treatment of this subject lends support to the view that his union of egoists would encourage the use of violence to settle disputes. This seems to be indicated even more strongly by his views on the subjects of crime and punishment. Like all anarchists, he holds that what the state calls "crime" is not always an action which is an injury to innocent victims, but often rather an action which is a threat to the power of the state and those who control it. Most anarchists wish, however, to retain the concept of crime as an injury to both individuals and to the community as a whole, which should therefore be a concern of all members of the community. Stirner, however, rejects this concept, and accepts a purely personal interpretation of crime. He ridicules the idea that he should denounce a crime which "did not cause the slightest damage either to me or to any of those in whom I take an interest".[46] In fact, he goes so far as to propose the replacement of punishment entirely by "satisfaction", or blatant retaliation against those who act in ways disapproved by the egoist. "If one does to us what we *will not put up with*, we break his power and bring our own to bear: we satisfy *ourselves* on him, and do not fall into the folly of wanting to satisfy right (the spook)."[47]

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* Of course, to be consistent, he must also advise the capitalists to maintain their privileged position.

This passage presents Stirner's egoism at its ugliest, and reveals the authoritarian consciousness on which it is based (in spite of his efforts at times to present a libertarian political position). Furthermore, in his view of crime and punishment, he again ignores the fact that his supposedly sovereign ego is a thoroughly social product, and inseparable part of a larger whole. Though he may "take an interest" according to his egoistic whim, the "interest" of the individual, in any way that that term might objectively be defined, is affected by actions of all members of society.

In spite of the intimations of the necessity for violent action, Stirner holds that violence would not be widespread under his union of egoists. He contends that as people become more conscious of their egoism, they will see that it is more to their benefit to make peaceful agreements through contract than to clash in violence. He claims that the result would be a condition of non-violent opposition between egoists. A serious objection to this contention concerns Stirner's consistency in depicting the nature of the egoist. If the egoists regard only their own respective interests, they could be expected to resort to violence whenever such a tactic had a good chance of succeeding. It would seem that those egoists who feel that the contractual arrangement of society does not benefit them most would always be ready to change it by force, since they are not "possessed" by any delusions like concern for the welfare of the community.

Furthermore, it is questionable whether an egoist, as described by Stirner, would choose the contractual society at all. An effective egoist would seem to benefit more from exploiting an altruistic society, rather than from competing with other ruthless egoists. Stirner says that "I shall find enough . . . who unite with me without swearing allegiance to my flag".[48] But if an egoist really has no interest in the welfare of others it would seem advantageous for such an egoist to have as many as possible subject themselves to him or her. An extreme egoist should never be an anarchist of any sort, since one's greatest success would be in utilizing the state, if one could achieve a position in which one could exercise political power for one's own ends. This is certainly true if, as Oppenheimer contends, the main function of the state is to give to a special interest power which it could not achieve through either voluntary co-operation or free competition.* The theory of sovereignty appears to be ideally suited for the use of the egoist. The union of egoists therefore seems to confllict with Stirner's egoism itself. That system seems to be designed to best fill the demands of all the members in society, whilst not necessarily being the system which will benefit any single egoist most. Yet, according to Stirner's ethics, that own single interest is all the individual should or can consider in making decisions. The shrewdest egoists would then be led by Stirner's own principles to reject the union.

Stirner himself, it appears, began in his later writings to modify his conception of the union of egoists. There he de-emphasizes the artificial, calculating, nature of the union, and interprets a number of relationships which exist "not on paper but rather in life"[49] as forms of egoistic union. He gives as examples the companionship of children at play, and the relationship between friends or lovers.[50] His explanation of why such unions are egoistic—because those participating in them unite not out of "self-sacrifice", but because they expect pleasure—seems totally inadequate. But beneath the surface there seems to be a faint awareness that there is in such relations a quality which makes them a model for all social relationships. What Stirner failed to apprehend was that this quality is not egoism, which is probably not present at all, but the quality of free and spontaneous co-operation or mutuality.

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* See Franz Oppenheimer, *The State,* forthcoming from Free Life Editions. (An earlier English edition was published by Bobbs-Merrill.)

CHAPTER VI

STIRNER AND ANARCHISM

As was mentioned at the beginning of this essay, Stirner's greatest historical importance lies in his influence on anarchist thought. This final chapter will be concerned with a brief investigation of Stirner's relationship to anarchism, and with the fundamental question of whether it is correct to label him an anarchist.

Stirner has often been looked upon as the first major theorist of individualist anarchism. In this connection he has received considerable attention in studies of anarchist thought. Woodcock includes him among six anarchist thinkers to whom he devotes an entire chapter in his history of anarchism.* Guérin in *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* treats him as a major figure in anarchist theory in his chapter on "The Basic Idea of Anarchism".† Runkle's *Anarchism: Old and New* contains numerous references to Stirner as a theorist of the "old" anarchism.§ He is one of the six writers whose works are included as "classics of anarchist thought" in Shatz's *Essential Works*

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* George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), Part I, Ch. 4. An American edition is published by World Publishing Company.

† Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970).

§ Runkle's book shows little understanding of, though some acquaintance with anarchist thought and practice. The thesis of the book, that existentialism, the New Left, and the American Radical Right are all "forms" of "the new anarchism" is so absurd as to destroy any pretentions the book might have of being a serious work of scholarship.

*of Anarchism,** and several selections from his writings are included in Krimerman and Perry's anthology *Patterns of Anarchy*.† Finally, and most notably, Martin's *Men Against the State* presents abundant evidence of Stirner's influence on American individualist anarchism, and includes an entire section of "Stirnerism and the Tucker Associates".§

In spite of the considerable literature linking Stirner with anarchism, some writers have rejected the validity of this connection. Fleischman, for example, holds that Stirner is not an anarchist. His grounds for this position are, however, quite flimsy. He seems to think that anarchists are people who totally reject society, and that since Stirner advocates a union of egoists, he is therefore not really an anarchist.** Presumably a true anarchist would be more individualistic than Stirner.

A more serious criticism of the view that Stirner is an anarchist is attempted by Paterson, who devotes an entire chapter of his study of Stirner to the topic of "Stirner and the Anarchists". While he admits that "Stirner and his book are more widely known among students of anarchist theory than among any other group of serious students,†† he maintains, first, that anarchism has not been influenced to any considerable degree by Stirner, and, secondly, that Stirner should not be considered an anarchist at all, since he disagrees with anarchism on many important issues. Both of these contentions should be considered carefully.

First, Paterson's claim that Stirner has not influenced historical anarchism is not supported by the facts. Individualist anarchism, to the contrary, has been greatly affected by his thought. Paterson contends that Tucker, for example, did not really follow Stirner, and differs from the latter on key issues. Tucker, he says, argues for respect for rights, equal freedom, and keeping of contracts, and is, unlike Stirner, "a moralist and a social reformer".* Paterson is not convincing on this point. None of the quotations cited by Paterson give evidence that Tucker rejected any important elements of Stirner's position, and the truth seems closer to Martin's assessment that "Tucker became solidly attached to Stirnerism".† Tucker did not advocate adherence to contracts because of any belief in natural rights or self-evident moral principles, or even a concern for general utility. He sees the basis for contract as being purely egoistic, and his explanation calls to mind Stirner's egoistic union. Contract, he says, is "a tacit agreement or understanding between human beings . . . as individuals living in daily contact and dependent on some sort of co-operation with each other for the satisfaction of their daily wants, not to trespass upon each other's individuality, the motive of this agreement being the purely egoistic desire of each for the peaceful preservation of his own individuality".§ Tucker is thus fully in accord with Stirner on the issue. His admiration for Stirner is evidenced by the fact that he published an English-language edition of *The Ego and His Own.* It is clear, then, that the foremost American individualist anarchist theorist was profoundly influenced by Stirner. Other anarchists associated with Tucker, including James Walker, John Beverly Robinson, and Steven Byington, also drew upon Stirner's thought.

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* Marshall Shatz, ed. *The Essential Works of Anarchism* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).

† Leonard Krimerman and Lewis Perry, eds. *Patterns of Anarchy* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1966).

§ James J. Martin, *Men Against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America*, 1827-1908 (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles, 1970). Martin's book, which is a work of highly competent scholarship (and, by the way, quite sympathetic to Stirner and individualism), is wholeheartedly recommended to those interested in the various varieties of individualist anarchism.

** Fleischman, p. 223. †† Paterson, p. 127.

Stirner's influence on individualist anarchism has continued to the present, and I strongly suspect that it is in fact growing. While Paterson asserts that "he has no philosophical disciples among anarchists",* the egoistic tradition has been carried on by several contemporary representatives, perhaps most notably S. E. Parker, who edits the Stirnerite journal *Minus One*. Parker's lively and pointed remarks on numerous issues often appear in anarchist publications and eloquently express the individualist position. There also exists a French publication, *Moi,* which is inclined toward Stirnerian egoism. Finally, many of the assumptions of the American anarcho-capitalists are similar to Stirner's. While some accept natural right or utilitarian theories, many base their position on egoism, and some look directly to Stirner for inspiration.

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* *Ibid.*, p. 129.

† Martin, p. 250. § Quoted in Martin, p. 252.

While Stirner has had great influence on the extreme individualist wing of anarchism, he has also been seen as a significant thinker by figures who are more in the mainstream of the anarchist tradition. Emma Goldman, for example, combines an acceptance of many of the principles of anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism with a strong emphasis on individuality and personal uniqueness. The inspiration for this latter part of her outlook comes from thinkers like Emerson, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and not least of all, Stirner.† More recently, Herbert Read has commented on the value of Stirner's defence of individuality.§ In view of such influence on important figures of both individualist and social anarchism, Paterson's contention that "we find scarcely any evidence to show that the principles or practice of historic anarchism has been significantly modified by the idea of *Der Einzige* at any main point",** must be rejected.

Paterson's second point, that Stirner is himself not an anarchist, is more difficult to deal with. He comes to this conclusion because of his very narrow definition of anarchism. In his view, for one to be an anarchist, one must be a rationalist, be idealistic, be against government and authority, be opposed to property, believe people to have a moral sense and respect for others, demand social responsibility, and aim at a society based on co-operation. Accordingly, since Stirner fails to meet most of these criteria, he is judged not to be an anarchist. It should be noted that on the basis of this definition of anarchism, most individualists would be read out of the movement, and many social anarchists would have somewhat dubious credentials.

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* Paterson, p. 102.

† See *Red Emma Speaks,* ed. Alix Kates Shulman (New York: Vintage, 1972), p. 192.

§ See Read's essay on Stirner in *The Tenth Muse*.

** Paterson, p. 127.

In order to decide whether Paterson is justified in excluding Stirner from anarchism, the meaning of the terms "anarchist" and "anarchism" must be considered more carefully. I have done this in considerable detail elsewhere.* At present, I will only summarize very briefly what I take to be the necessary criteria for calling someone an anarchist, and then see whether Stirner meets these criteria.

In developing criteria for applying the terms "anarchist" and "anarchism", several things must be considered. First, the criteria must perform the function of revealing the common characteristics of the social and political theories which have historically been called forms of anarchism. Secondly, they must show the underlying assumptions behind anarchism as a historical movement for social change, and thereby link theory to practice. And finally, they must give a basis for distinguishing anarchist theory and practice from other political philosophies and social movements. On the basis of these considerations, I see four criteria as being necessary for a minimum definition of anarchism.

Anarchism has, first, a view of the ideal society. This society is seen as non-coercive, non-dominating, and non-exploitative. Secondly, anarchism has a criticism of existing institutions, based on this view of the ideal. Present institutions, and, above all, the state, are criticized as being oppressive, and destructive of freedom, individuality, and autonomy. Third, anarchists have a view of human nature which gives hope for significant movement in the direction of the ideal. They may be very pessimistic about the effects of authoritarian institutions on people, but they also believe that people have a great potential for autonomous, creative action, which can be realized if the requisite social conditions are created. Finally, anarchists have a distinctive set of practical proposals for immediate change in the direction of the ideal. They believe that voluntaristic, decentralist, liberatory alternatives can now be established to begin the development of a free human society.

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* See my article "What Is Anarchism?" in *NOMOS XVIII: Anarchism,* forthcoming from Aldine Press.

According to this definition, both individualists and socialists can be seen to fit into the anarchist tradition. The individualist anarchist presents a vision of an ideal society based on voluntary contracts, a criticism of coercive action by the state, a view of human nature which sees people as being capable of rational, mutually beneficial agreements, and proposals for replacing governmental institutions by voluntary ones. There is no reason, in view of the history of anarchism, why such individuals should not be called anarchists.

Neither, however, is there any reason to consider such a position a very consistent or convincing form of anarchism. I contend that if the full implications of the concepts of domination, exploitation, and coercion are understood, the individualist acceptance of competition and self-interest as the basis for social organization must be rejected. A view of anarchism which seeks to eliminate coercion and the state, but which overlooks other ways in which people dominate other people, is a very incomplete and quite contradictory type of anarchism. The most thorough-going and perceptive anarchist theories have shown that all types of domination are interrelated, all are destructive, and all must be eliminated. This includes not only domination of subjects by political rulers, but domination of races by other races, of females by males, of the young by the old, of the weak by the strong, of the poor by the rich, and not least of all, the domination of nature by humans. Many of these (and other) forms of domination can be carried out in a "free", non-coercive, contractual manner, as some conservatives have perceived, and it is naive for some anarchists to think that mere opposition to political control will in itself lead to an end to oppression. Anarchism may begin as a revolt against political authority, but if followed to its logical conclusion it becomes an all-encompassing critique of the will to dominate and all its manifestations.

All of this can be applied to Stirner's philosophy. Stirner can validly be called an anarchist according to the definition presented here. His ideal society is the union of egoists, in which peaceful egoistic competition would replace the state and society. He obviously has a thoroughgoing criticism of the state and many other social institutions, which he sees as destructive of individuality. He sees human beings as being fundamentally egoistic; however, he believes that this selfishness can be used as a basis for contractual agreements in which all pursue their respective egoistic interests. Finally, he proposes secession from existing society, and the establishment of contractual relationships as the practical method of achieving the egoistic union.

Thus, Stirner's position is a form of anarchism; yet it is a greatly inadequate form. He opposes domination of the ego by the state, but he advises people to seek to dominate others in any other way they can manage. Ultimately, might makes right. It is difficult, in fact, to see why the union of egoists should be preferred by any egoist who happens to be in a position to exercise political authority. While Stirner completely rejects the state as a transcendent reality above the ego, there seems to be no reason why he should reject it as a practical means of extending the ego's power and ownership (especially as the modern secular state sheds its mystical trappings and reveals its basis in raw power). Although Stirner is an anarchist, there seems to be no essential reason why, on the basis of his egoism, he necessarily should be one.

Anarchism is most profoundly *critical* (to use a favourite Young Hegelian term) when it goes beyond its analysis of the state and other social institutions and uncovers an authoritarian consciousness which is not only shaped by authoritarian institutions, but also expresses itself through those institutions. Such a critical anarchism settles for nothing less than the simultaneous transformation of both the institutions and this consciousness into their opposites—a system of libertarian social institutions which are the self-expression of creative, autonomous, and co-operative persons. Stirner, for all his opposition to the state and concern for individual autonomy, still exalts the will to dominate, and still accepts the authoritarian consciousness. Thus, while he is an anarchist in the sense that he opposes domination of the individual by the state and authoritarian morality, his anarchism is of the most inconsistent and contradictory type. Though the social anarchist (and libertarian socialists in general) can join Stirner and his ideological descendants in common opposition to the crushing of the individual by the oppressive state and intolerant public opinion, the alliance will always be a precarious one. For the social anarchist will find that the egoist reproduces in everyday life what all anarchists condemn as evil in social institutions.

CONCLUSION

STIRNER AND THE PRESENT

We have witnessed in the mid-twentieth century the working out of the opposition between two powerful historical forces, liberal capitalism and Marxian socialism. On the one hand, we have seen the realization of the implications of capitalist individualism. It has reached its fulfilment in a society in which increased consumption of commodities becomes the highest end of existence. It has exalted abstractions above human needs. It has destroyed the last vestiges of communal life. It has used the mad pursuit of increased production to disguise spiritual impoverishment. It has degraded and disfigured the natural environment, and blighted and dehumanized the social environment. It has maintained permanent inequality through the myth of equal opportunity. It has even reduced the supposedly sacred individual to a position of helplessness before the technically aggrandized machine of the corporate state. On the other hand, we have observed the parallel development of authoritarian socialism. It has empowered a new ruling elite to regulate its massive impersonal bureaucracy. It has trampled upon individual freedom and creativity in defence of ideological orthodoxy. It has ignored human needs in favour of industrial and technological development. It has sought to reduce society to a grim, monotonous efficiency. It has preserved the power-relationships of capitalism, while masking them in the guise of "socialism" and "communism".

Thus, the two great "contradictory" historical movements have approached a point of convergence. Were one to describe a society in terms such as hierarchy, bureaucracy, the centralized state, powerlessness of the individual, social atomization, technological control, heavy industrialization, global imperialism, and destruction of nature, which society would it be? Ironically, the terms seem to apply equally to Russia's state capitalism and America's socialism of the rich.

Since these supposedly antithetical historical tendencies have produced such similar results, it is not surprising that as their consequences have become evident, the necessity for antagonism, for "cold war", has been brought into question. Perhaps hierarchy has finally entrenched itself sufficiently in the very structure of society that it does not at the present moment need to make its customary use of the myth of the Satanic Enemy. Perhaps the erstwhile enemies can now join together in a common pursuit of domination.

Or perhaps there is another historical possibility. Anarchism has proposed an alternative synthesis of the values of liberalism and socialism. This synthesis is suggested in Bakunin's famous statement that "freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice, . . . Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality".* Anarchism seeks to preserve liberal values such as individuality, personal freedom, autonomy, individual responsibility, and pluralism. But it also attempts to realize such socialist values, as equality, community, co-operation, social responsibility, and solidarity. As in any true dialectical synthesis, the opposition between the opposing elements is not overcome, but is rather preserved in a kind of enduring tension. Thus, within social anarchism itself there is a tension between its libertarian and communal elements, a tension which must be preserved if it is to avoid deteriorating into a form of liberal individualism or authoritarian socialism. Social anarchism is therefore a thoroughly self-critical position, exercising constant vigilance in order to avoid the dangers to individuality which might arise from its commitment to communalism, and the dangers to community which might arise from its pursuit of individual autonomy. Social anarchism offers this synthesis as an alternative to that mentioned earlier. Thus the true opposition at present is not between corporate capitalism and authoritarian socialism, but rather between these two forms of domination and the anarchistic forces of liberation which are now just beginning to manifest themselves.

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* Mikhail Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, ed. G. P. Maximoff (New York: Free Press, 1953), p. 269.

How does Stirner fit into this scheme? In some ways he appears to make a contribution to the libertarian position. He is a severe critic of many elements of liberalism which have been rejected by anarchism. He sees through the hypocrisy of bourgeois morality and shows it to be a threat to individuality and personal authenticity. He also sees the futility of the pursuit of status and material wealth for their own sake, and the debilitating effects of the Protestant ethic. He warns us of the dangers of authoritarian socialism, and, in general, of the acceptance of the state as a reality superior to human beings themselves. He demolishes theories which would give a basis to political and social authoritarianism, and legitimatize the destruction of individual autonomy.

Yet all this criticism is based on a fundamentally false view of the self. Stirner can have no understanding of values like community, solidarity, co-operation, and mutual aid because he erroneously abstracts the ego from its origins as a social creation, and its on-going relationship of interdependence with society and nature. This is the significance of the following passage from Bookchin:

> "Ironically, this inner, isolated self turns out to be one of the most fictitious of universals, one of the most treacherous abstractions, a metaphysical concept in which consciousness, far from expanding, contracts into banalities and trivia. . . . Valid introspection turns out to be the conscious appropriation of a self formed largely by the world, and thus a judgment of the world and of the actions needed to reconstitute it along new lines."*

Although it is not aimed specifically at Stirner, it admirably points out the fallacy of his kind of individualism.

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* Murray Bookchin, "Desire and Need" in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, 1971), p. 286.

Libertarian theory, if it is to be convincing today, must take into account the conceptions of the nature of reality which the natural and social sciences are revealing to us. If we do so, I believe that we will conclude that an individualism which overlooks the way in which the individual is shaped by the whole and realizes him or herself through the whole is no more valid than a totalitarianism which denies the reality of the individual entirely. Koestler has expressed this truth well in his description of biological and social individuals as "holons" —"self-regulating systems which display both the autonomous properties of wholes and the dependent properties of parts".* Such a holon "has the dual tendency to preserve and assert its individuality as a quasi-autonomous whole; and to function as an integrated part of an (existing or evolving) larger whole".† In many ways this scientific and philosophical position correlates with the political and social position of anarchism, which seeks to synthesize individuality and sociality, and recognizes the truth of both.

Mumford's analysis of technics also sheds light on the nature of this interrelationship. He argues that a humane society must preserve individual autonomy and spontaneity, and he steadfastly defends the cause of the individual against dehumanization by the machine. However, he holds that individual creative accomplishments can only be understood as part of a larger social process. After giving detailed analysis of specific lines of technological development, he concludes that "the creative life, in all its manifestations, is necessarily a social product. . . . The addition to this heritage made by any individual, or even by any generation, is so small in comparison to the accumulated resources of the past that the great creative artists, like Goethe, are duly humble about their personal importance. To treat such an activity as egoistic enjoyment or as property is merely to brand it as trivial. . . .* Egoism and individualism correctly point to the importance of individual creativity, but they overlook the social context in which all creative action takes place. They abstract it from the larger process of social evolution. In analysing technological development we must look not only at individual acts of "invention", but also at the social heritage which each of these presupposes. According to Mumford, "all our really primary data are social and vital. One begins with life; and one knows life, not as a fact in the raw, but only as one is conscious of human society and uses the tools and instruments society has developed through history—words, symbols, grammar, logic, the whole technique of communication and funded experience".† This is even more obviously true of the specific "tools and instruments" required in any technical field.

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* Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (Chicago: Regnery, 1967), p. 341.

† *Ibid.*, p. 343.

The development of the science of ecology has led in the direction of a view of reality that is not only social but also libertarian. By focusing on the ways in which humans are related to the whole of nature, ecology has produced a wider realization that human beings are an inseparable part not only of human society, but indeed of a society which includes (at least) all living beings. The ecological view of nature is analogous to the social anarchist view of community: a system in which the integrity of the whole and the integrity of the part are mutually dependent. If some individuals upset the harmonious balance in pursuit of a limited and false "self-interest", the whole, and thus each individual, is injured and perhaps destroyed. But, on the other hand, if the whole is conceived of in a way which does not recognize the importance and interrelationship of all the parts, the pursuit of a false "general interest" produces the same catastrophic result. Thus, Bookchin has very cogently argued "that an anarchist community would approximate a clearly definable ecosystem; it would be diversified, balanced, and harmonious".*

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* Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1963), pp. 409-10.

† *Ibid.*, p. 370.

This same point could be approached from numerous other perspectives, but the theme of these concluding remarks should now be clear: a valid view of human nature, a valid ethics, and a valid social and political theory require a tenable view of the nature of reality as a whole. Thus, a position like Stirner's, which shows an utter disregard for the social nature of the self, and which consequently misinterprets the place of the individual in the universe, cannot yield acceptable results in any area of application. It is wrong in its fundamental presupposition. In view of modern science's explanation of the universe as a system or field of energy, and of all "things" as processes within that system, not only mechanism and static materialism, but also egoism must be rejected. Such views as Mumford's "organic ideology" and Whitehead's "philosophy of organism" are obviously much more adequate accounts of reality. Hegel's contention that "the truth is the whole" (albeit a whole to which each part makes a necessary and enduring contribution) appears to be justified. It is not such a standpoint, but rather metaphysical egoism, which must be dismissed as groundless superstition.

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* Bookchin, p. 80. See the essay, "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought" in its entirety, pp. 57-82.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

1 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 32.
2 *Ibid.*
3 *Ibid.,* p. 150. 4 *Ibid.,* p. 351. 5 *Ibid.,* p. 150.
6 *Ibid.,* p. 5. 7 *Ibid.,* p. 37. 8 *Ibid.,* p. 150.
9 Westel Willoughby, *The Ethical Basis of Political Authority* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 39.
10 Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften,* p. 117.
11 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 138.
12 Ludwig Feuerbach, "Das Wesen des Christenthums in Beziehung auf den Einzigen und sein Eigenthum" in *Erläuterungen und Ergänzungen zum Wesen des Christenthums* (Stuttgart-Bad Connstatt: Frommann Verlag, 1960), p. 299.
13 *Ibid.,* pp. 301-2.
14 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Die Deutsche Ideologie* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1960), p. 118.
15 Abraham Edel, *Ethical Judgement: The Use of Science in Ethics* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1955), p. 175.
16 Wilbur Marshall Urban, *Fundamentals of Ethics* (New York: Holt, 1933), p. 7.
17 Herbert Read, *The Tenth Muse: Essays in Criticism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 79.
18 Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End* (New York, Harper, 1957), p. 31.
19 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 13.
20 *Ibid.,* p. 182. 21 *Ibid.,* p. 366.
22 *Ibid.,* p. 14. 23 *Ibid.,* p. 359.
24 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 328.
25 *Ibid.,* p. 50. 26 *Ibid.,* p. 49.
27 Frederick Albert Lange, *The History of Materialism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), p. 256.
28 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 30.
29 *Ibid.,* p. 63.
30 Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften,* p. 37.
31 *Ibid.,* pp. 41-2. 32 *Ibid.,* p. 43.
33 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 32.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 33. 35 *Ibid.*, p. 126. 36 *Ibid.*, p. 177.
37 *Ibid.*, p. 363. 38 *Ibid.*, p. 182. 39 *Ibid.*, p. 329.
40 *Ibid.* 41 *Ibid.*, p. 327. 42 *Ibid.*, p. 325.
43 Eduard von Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (London: Trübner and Co., 1884), vol. III, p. 97.
44 Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften,* p. 118.
45 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 352.
46 *Ibid.*, p. 347.
47 MacLellan, for example, writes that Stirner "was indeed a solipsist" (p. 119).
48 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* pp. 32-3.
49 *Ibid.*, p. 351. 50 *Ibid.*, p. 347.
51 Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften,* p. 118.
52 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
53 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 366.
54 Feuerbach, "Wesen des Christenthums", p. 295.
55 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 148.
56 Paterson, pp. 219-20.
57 *Ibid.*, p. 246. 58 *Ibid.*, p. 310.
59 See John Findlay, "The Logic of Mysticism" in *Religious Studies* (1972).
60 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* pp. 81, 82, 161.
61 Marx and Engels, *Deutsche Ideologie,* p. 301.
62 *Ibid.*, p. 286.
63 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 139.
64 *Ibid.*, p. 311. 65 *Ibid.*, pp. 296-97. 66 *Ibid.*, p. 164.
67 *Ibid.*, p. 182. 68 *Ibid.*, p. 65. 69 *Ibid.*, p. 337.

CHAPTER II

1 John Hospers, *Human Conduct* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1969), p. 141.
2 *Ibid.*
3 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 36.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 60. 5 *Ibid.*, p. 13. 6 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 291.
8 Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften,* p. 159.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 184.
10 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 132.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 162.
12 Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften,* p. 142.
13 *Ibid.*, p. 122.
14 F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 255.

15 Joseph Butler, "Sermons", in *British Moralists,* ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), vol. I, p. 228.
16 Hospers, *Human Conduct,* p. 154.
17 Bradley, p. 255.
18 *Ibid.* 19 *Ibid.,* p. 259.
20 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 291.
21 Bradley, p. 260.
22 A. C. Graham, *The Problem of Value* (London: Hutchinson Un. Library, 1961), p. 49.
23 W. T. Stace, *The Concept of Morals* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), p. 279.
24 Thomas Hill Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), p. 165.
25 *Ibid.*
26 Butler, p. 227.
27 Hospers, p. 148.
28 Butler, 191-92.
29 Butler, p. 227.
30 P. H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 125.
31 Graham, p. 43.
32 *Ibid.*
33 Moritz Schlick, *Problems of Ethics* (New York: Dover, 1962), p. 75.

CHAPTER III

1 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 76.
2 Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften,* p. 143.
3 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 59.
4 Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften,* p. 78.
5 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 123.
6 *Ibid.,* p. 318. 7 *Ibid.,* p. 206. 8 *Ibid.,* p. 276.
9 *Ibid.,* p. 189. 10 *Ibid.,* p. 191. 11 *Ibid.,* p. 190.
12 *Ibid.,* p. 205.
13 *Ibid.,* p. 262. See also p. 267.
14 Paterson, p. 169.
15 *Ibid.,* pp. 263-64.
16 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 257.
17 *Ibid.,* p. 358. 18 *Ibid.*
19 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 3.
20 *Ibid.,* p. 161.
21 Hospers, pp. 159-60.
22 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 133.

23 Marcus George Singer, *Generalization in Ethics* (New York: Knopf, 1961), pp. 273-4.
24 Paterson, p. 266.
25 See Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1958), pp. 189-90.
26 Hospers, p. 169.
27 Adam Smith, *Untersuchungen über das Wesen und die Ursachen des Nationalreichthums.* Deutsch mit Anmerkungen von Max Stirner (Leipzig: Wigand, 1845-47).

CHAPTER IV

1 Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 7.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 16. 3 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
5 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 308.
6 *Ibid.*, pp. 158-59. 7 *Ibid.*, p. 68. 8 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 105. 10 *Ibid.*
11 Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften,* pp. 73-4.
12 *Ibid.*
13 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 106.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
15 Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften,* p. 78.
16 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* pp. 160-61.
17 *Ibid.* 18 *Ibid.*, p. 157. 19 *Ibid.*, p.171.
20 *Ibid,* 21 *Ibid.*, p. 165. 22 *Ibid.*
23 *Ibid.*, p. 167. 24 *Ibid.*, p. 166. 25 *Ibid.*, p. 256.
26 *Ibid.*, p. 248. 27 *Ibid.*, p. 251. 28 *Ibid.*
29 Whitney Oates, ed. *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers* (New York: Random House, 1940), p. 468.
30 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 313.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 358.

CHAPTER V

1 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 44.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 99. 3 *Ibid.* 4 *Ibid.*, p. 227.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 224. 6 *Ibid.*, p. 308. 7 *Ibid.*
8 *Ibid.*
9 William Ebenstein, ed. *Great Political Thinkers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 350.
10 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 195.

11 *Ibid.,* pp. 252-3.
12 *Ibid.,* p. 99. 13 *Ibid.* 14 *Ibid.,* pp. 115-16.
15 *Ibid.,* p. 197. 16 *Ibid.* 17 *Ibid.,* p. 196.
18 *Ibid.,* p. 228. 19 *Ibid.* 20 *Ibid.,* p. 223.
21 *Ibid.,* p. 313.
22 See Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution.*
23 Max Stirner, *Geschichte der Reaction* (Berlin: Allgemeine deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1852), p. 255.
24 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 316.
25 *Ibid.,* p. 215. 26 *Ibid.,* p. 306. 27 *Ibid.*
28 *Ibid.* 29 *Ibid.* 30 *Ibid.,* p. 309.
31 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 1937), p. 14.
32 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own,* p. 120.
33 *Ibid.* 34 *Ibid.,* p. 268. 35 *Ibid.*
36 *Ibid.,* p. 262. 37 *Ibid.,* p. 179. 38 *Ibid.,* p. 209.
39 *Ibid.,* pp. 306-7. 40 *Ibid.,* p. 313. 41 *Ibid.,* p. 292.
42 *Ibid.,* p. 310. 43 *Ibid.,* p. 258.
44 *Ibid.,* p. 255. 45 *Ibid.,* p. 271. 46 *Ibid.,* p. 78.
47 *Ibid.,* p. 241 48 *Ibid.,* p. 236.
49 Stirner, *Kleinere Schriften,* p. 164.
50 *Ibid.*

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WHILST AGREEING with other critics that Stirner's thought must ultimately be looked upon as a process of egoistic enjoyment for the author, John Clark in this original essay argues that there is no reason to limit ones view of it in this way for there are other dimensions to Stirner's thought besides the aesthetic: for example his speculation concerning the nature of ultimate reality, the meaning of moral values, and the purposes of social organisation. His comments on these topics are worthy of analysis for several reasons. To begin with, he often writes as if his criticism of opposing viewpoints and his own ideas on these subjects have some kind of objective validity. The fact that he would maintain his position on egoistic grounds even if it were shown to be objectively absurd does not prevent one from dealing with his claims that there is also evidence in favour of that position. Furthermore, many have read Stirner and concluded that he is saying something cogent about the nature of things. His defence of egoism has thus had an important influence on individualist anarchism and "right-wing" libertarianism. Whether those influenced by his thought have really understood his standpoint is irrelevant: in view of the influence, his arguments take on growing historical significance. The present essay is therefore aimed at those (whatever their viewpoint) who wish to consider the coherence, consistency, cogency, and defensibility of Stirner's arguments. Those, on the other hand, who look upon thought as merely a means toward egoistic enjoyment will have little to gain from this discussion.

John P Clark was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1945, and is at present teaching philosophy in the City College of Loyola University.

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